





# **American History**

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**A Critical Analysis**

**By Ben Rothschild**

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*"Grant is a man of a good deal of rough dignity; rather taciturn; quick and decided in speech. He habitually wears an expression as if he had determined to drive his head through a brick wall, and was about to do it."*

- Letter from Colonel Theodore Lyman, April 1864



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## Introduction: Teaching American History

In 2014, in response to the achievements of the Obama administration, conservative parents strongly protested the College Board regarding their guidelines for AP United States History. By 2015, the new guidelines had removed key words from their recommendations for the American history curriculum, such as “white supremacy” and “xenophobia.” What is the role of ethnic studies in a functioning democracy? In recent years, parents have been showing up at board meetings in K-12 to demand revisions to the history curriculum, claiming that studying gender and race is having a harmful effect on students. They claim critical race theory, which is an academic term describing theories in higher education, is inaccurate. Books on LGBT history and black history are being removed from many schools’ curriculum. This critical analysis is an attempt to remedy that.

There is no national history curriculum. What is taught in classrooms is decided at the state and county level, if there are any requirements. Due to the local nature of the issue, this is why there has been such widespread disagreement. Even the process of writing a history textbook, whether that covers world or American history, involves a lot of negotiation between different perspectives of teachers, writers, administrators and community members. The essays that follow are from a combination of situations. Three chapters were written for my bachelor’s degree in history. Some of the book was

written as an activist guidebook when I previously did more public speaking in my life. What remains is my contribution to what I think is a growing gap between the public dialogue concerning education policy and what materials and resources are out there that can help with education.

A significant amount of people may disagree with the study of the history of racism. Focusing too much on the past may make people feel worse than necessary. After all, the events that happened centuries ago involved different people that had nothing to do with those of the present. Nonetheless, relationships that exist today are bequeathed to us from institutions and ideologies that were created long ago yet still govern our lives. To be honest, there is not much profit in the field of history. People who work in this discipline do it because they think it's important. If you really aren't feeling threatened by an idea, you would not be bothered if it was discussed. If you don't think an idea has merit, then people's life experiences will disprove its effectiveness. How can this book improve the history curriculum?

Share it with your friends and family. Talk to your history teachers and ask them to consider assigning my book for their class. What is the relationship between ecology and American history? People often do not realize the extent to which geography and environment shape the conditions of our lives. The United States, which formed through westward expansion, is rooted in the Mississippi River, the Great Plains, and the mountain ranges of the West. Some of my favorite places in America are the Cyprus trees and the swamps of the South and the old growth forests of Shawnee and the Upper Peninsula in Michigan. The prosperity of the United States has its basis

in the natural resources of its borders and the development of industry on its land.

Chapter one is a summary of the life of Frederick Douglass. President Donald Trump recently described the abolitionist as “an example of somebody who’s done an amazing job and is being recognized more and more.” The comment did not clearly state whether he thought the person was still alive or that he had been careless with his usage of verbs. Chapters two and three are from a class I took during my bachelor’s on the comparative study of slavery, serfdom, and emancipation. Chapter four is a summary of the personal life of Abraham Lincoln and based on the book that was made into the movie *Lincoln*. Chapter five is an essay that I wrote for a graduate level anthropology class and describes how nationalism creates its own mythology. The transition to the 20th century involves the telling of the story of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, which is chapter six. Short essays in chapter seven on the importance of the Birmingham and Selma campaigns lead to the contribution of Bayard Rustin in chapter eight. Rustin was an excellent example of peace activism of the 20th century. One could make the argument that without Rustin’s counsel on the methods of Gandhi, Dr. King would not have been known for the philosophy of non-violence that he espoused today. The civil rights movement of that time provided a broadening of people’s outlook that led to the expression of movements for women’s and LGBT equality in the late 1960s.

The last section of the book, on ecology, are some writings that are a collection of my thoughts on the environment. The conclusion is an attempt to bring all the ideas in the book together and talks about the significance of both the historical person General Sherman and the tree.

A lot of these writings were done not with any goal in mind but are part of being a citizen of the United States, being interested in nature, and exploring the past and the present.



## 19<sup>th</sup> Century

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## 1

**Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass**

*“Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or with both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress.”*

- Frederick Douglass

The Civil War and Reconstruction in America were a revolution. The Civil War and Reconstruction took away slaves from the ownership of the Southern bourgeoisie. Slavery would never have been abolished in America if the groundwork had not been laid with small victories that unsettled the institution. Frederick Douglass, as a teenager, stood up to the abuse of his owner, Mr. Covey, and put an end to his whippings and beatings. The *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* is an inspiring autobiography and one of the best books ever written in American history. Written in 1845, before slavery's overthrow, Douglass conquered an enormous amount of fear to get these words out. After he escaped slavery, Douglass became a public speaker, writer, and leader of the abolitionist movement in the United States.

During the Civil War, the abolitionist movement played the decisive role in pushing the Union to adopt the Emancipation Proclamation and making the Civil War into a war to abolish slavery. Frederick Douglass's life cracked the foundation of slavery.

## EARLY LIFE

Douglass was born in 1818 in Maryland. He did not know his exact birthday. His master, Anthony, kept the information from him. Anthony told him that questioning about one's birthday was "evidence of a restless spirit." Douglass noticed that all the white children knew their birthdays. He said that not knowing his birthday was a source of unhappiness for him throughout his childhood. During the summers and winters as a child, he was only given a shirt to wear that reached to his knees. He would sleep at night in a bag used for carrying corn. His head went in first and his feet stuck out. The cold cracked his feet so much that he could lay a pen in the deep cuts in his feet.

One day, Anthony called for Douglass's Aunt Hester in the middle of the night. Anthony wanted to sexually abuse her. She was absent and later found in the company of another slave named Ned, who belonged to another master. In response, her master took her to the kitchen and stripped her from neck to waste. Douglass hid in a closet nearby. He tied her hands with a strong rope and made her stand on a stool. Above the stool was a hook on the ceiling. She hung her hands from the rope on the hook. She stood on the stool on the ends of her toes. Anthony said to her, "Now, you d-----d b-----h, I'll learn you how to disobey my orders."

He began whipping her. She had a high-pitched piercing scream. Her blood dripped to the floor. Douglass heard the whole thing. He thought he was about to be tortured next. He stayed in the closet until long after the torture was over. Douglass said he was often awakened at sunrise by the piercing screams of his own aunt being tied up and whipped until she was literally covered in blood. His master would not stop until he was overcome by tiredness.

On the first page of his autobiography, he said that his father was a white man. His mother was raped. He said he heard rumors that his master was his father, but he was not sure. Douglass and his mother were separated as an infant. It was the policy of slave owners in Maryland to separate slave children from their mothers before they reached their twelfth month. This was done to prevent the children from developing affection towards their mothers. Douglass grew up on the outer edge of the plantation, where his grandmother raised him and other children. His grandmother was too old for field labor.

Douglass never saw his mother more than four or five times throughout his whole life. Each of these meetings was very short and at night. His mom walked twelve miles from the plantation where she worked to see Douglass. After performing a day's work in the field, she would walk on foot. The punishment for not being in the field at sunrise for his mother was a whipping. His mom would lay down with him and get him to sleep. But long before he woke up, she would be gone. They barely said anything to each other during these moments. She died when he was seven. He was not allowed to be present during her illness, when she died, or at her burial. He found out about her death after it happened. He said that he



received the news of her death “with much the same emotions I should have probably felt at the death of a stranger.”

His mother’s courage to walk twelve miles on foot in the middle of the night in fear of receiving a whipping if she did not make it back by sunrise gave Douglass enormous courage. His mother’s love for him, although he barely knew her, helped give him the courage later to stand up to his overseer and escape slavery. His mother taught him his worth as a person.

Douglass writes:

The whisper that my master was my father, may or may not be true; and, true or false, it is of but little consequence to my purpose whilst the fact remains, in all its glaring odiousness, that slaveholders have ordained, and by law established, that the children of slave women shall in all cases follow the condition of their mothers; and this is done too obviously to administer to their own lusts, and make a gratification of their wicked desires profitable as well as pleasurable; for by this cunning arrangement, the slaveholder, in cases not a few, sustains to his slaves the double relation of master and father.

Sexual abuse defined slavery. Douglass wrote that slaves who had the same master as their father were treated worse than other slaves. He said that the slave was a “constant offense” to the white mistress. The master had to decide between selling his own child or watching one of

his white sons tie up their own sibling – who was only a few shades darker than themselves – and whip them.

Douglass grew up on a large plantation where over a thousand slaves lived. The central headquarters of the plantation was where the mechanical operations for all the farms were performed, such as metalwork, making fabric, and grinding grain. Slaves called it the *Great House Farm*. It was a privilege to do errands at the Great House Farm. Douglass says, “A representative could not be prouder of his election to a seat in the American Congress, than a slave on one of the out farms would be of his election to do errands at the Great House Farm.”

This was regarded as evidence of great confidence by the overseers in the slaves and it would get them away from doing fieldwork for a day, where one could be whipped. Douglass said that when slaves went on walks to do errands at the Great House Farm, they often sang in ways that revealed “at once the highest joy and the deepest sadness.” They would not be concerned with time or tune. He said that the thought that came up, came out. They were made up on the spot. The singing would make the woods echo for miles around. Douglass said that he once felt that one must only listen to the songs slaves sang, and it would demonstrate more clearly the “horrible character of slavery” than reading whole volumes of philosophy on the subject.

The songs expressed pain that could not come out any other way. Hearing the songs frequently made Douglass cry. He writes, “The mere recurrence to those songs, even now, afflicts me; and while I am writing these lines, an expression of feeling has already found its way down my cheek.”

This was the only point in the book where he mentioned crying as he wrote. He said that the songs were the way he realized, when he was growing, the “dehumanizing character of slavery.” The songs made him hate slavery even more. They added his sympathy for the people in slavery. His tears were an expression of hope for the future. Douglass writes, “The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears.”

A slave could have been whipped for responding to an overseer in a contradictory tone, giving their master a wrong look, or for no reason other than the fact that their owners enjoyed whipping them. Douglass told a story of a slave who, living on such a large plantation, had never met their master, Colonel Lloyd. One day his master was riding a horse along the road, and said:

“Well, boy, whom do you belong to?” “To Colonel Lloyd,” replied the slave. “Well, does the colonel treat you well?” “No, sir,” was the ready reply. “What, does he work you too hard?” “Yes, sir.” “Well, don’t he give you enough to eat?” “Yes, sir, he gives me enough, such as it is.”

The colonel asked where the slave belonged and rode on. The man had never dreamed that he was talking to his master. Two or three weeks later, his master had him sold south to a Georgia trader, for having found fault with his master. He was immediately chained and handcuffed, and without warning, was torn away from his family and friends. This for simply telling the truth. Douglass said that most slaves, when asked about the character of their

condition, said that they were happy and that their masters were kind. He said that there was a saying among the slaves, that a “still tongue makes a wise head.”

Once an overseer was whipping a slave named Demby. Demby, to get away from the great pain he was in, ran and jumped in the stream of water nearby. He stood in the stream with only his shoulders and head above water. The overseer said that he would give him three calls and if he did not come out at the third call would shoot him. After the three calls, the overseer took a musket to Demby’s face. He shot and killed Demby instantly. The body sank out of sight and blood and brains marked the water where he stood. The master later asked the overseer why he did that. The man replied that Demby had become “unmanageable” and was setting a dangerous example to the other slaves.

The overseer said that what he did was necessary or else it would lead to the destruction of all rule and order on the plantation. He said that “if one slave refused to be corrected, and escaped with his life,” other slaves would follow the example, gain their freedom, and it would lead to the enslavement of the whites. The murder was not even subjected to judicial investigation, because although there were many slaves watching, slaves were not allowed to file a lawsuit or testify.

The killing of a slave was not treated as a crime where Douglass grew up in Talbot County, Maryland. He mentioned a man named Mr. Thomas Lanman, who killed two slaves, one of whom with a small ax, by knocking his brains out. The man would often brag and laugh about it, saying that all slaves should be killed.

Douglass said that his wife’s cousin, a young woman aged between fifteen and sixteen, was murdered by the wife of Mr. Giles Hick. The woman beat her with a

piece of wood from the fireplace and broke her nose and her breastbone. The slave was severely disfigured and died a few hours later. The offense for the murder was that she was supposed to be taking care of Mrs. Hick's baby and fell asleep. The baby started crying. The caretaker woman didn't wake up because she had lost sleep for several nights previously. There was a warrant issued for Mrs. Hick's arrest, but it was never served.

Another slave, an old man on Colonel Lloyd's plantation, was fishing for oysters a little beyond the property of Colonel Lloyd's one day and happened to be on the premises of Mr. Beal Bondly. Mr. Bondly came down to the shore with his musket and murdered the old man. The next day Mr. Bondly came to see Colonel Lloyd and the whole affair was hushed up. Douglass says it was a common saying, even among little white boys, that it was worth a half-cent to kill a "n\*\*\*\*\*," and a half-cent to bury one.

## LEARNING TO READ

At a young age, Master Anthony gave Douglass to a woman named Lucretia Auld. Then Douglass's master sent him to live with Ms. Auld's brother-in-law in Baltimore, a man named Hugh Auld. Douglass was shocked to see the large towns, which he had never seen before. Sophia, the wife of Hugh Auld, was a woman who had never had a slave under her control before. She did not think it was rude if Douglass looked her in the face. When Douglass was about twelve, Sophia taught him the alphabet. Then she began teaching him three- and four-letter words.

At this point, Mr. Auld found out about the lessons. He told Sophia not to teach Douglass any further. He said that it was illegal and unsafe to teach a slave to read. He then said, “If you give a n\*\*\*\*\* an inch, he will take an ell. A n\*\*\*\*\* should know nothing but to obey his master – to do as he is told to do. Learning would *spoil* the best n\*\*\*\*\* in the world.” An ell is an old unit of measurement used in the clothing industry that is about 45 inches. Mr. Auld said that if Douglass learned how to read, there would be no point in keeping him because he would be unfit to be a slave. He said that it would do Douglass a “great deal of harm” and “make him discontented and unhappy.” Douglass wrote about his reaction to hearing this:

These words sank deep into my heart, stirred up sentiments within that lay slumbering, and called into existence an entirely new train of thought. It was a new and special revelation, explaining dark and mysterious things, with which my youthful understanding had struggled, but struggled in vain. I now understood what had been to me a most perplexing difficulty – to wit, the white man’s power to enslave the black man. It was a grand achievement, and I prized it highly. From that moment, I understood the pathway from slavery to freedom.

This is a beautiful passage. Education was life and death for Frederick Douglass. The seriousness with which Mr. Auld spoke those words convinced Frederick that Mr.

Auld knew the truth. Douglass became confident that learning to read would produce results. He wrote, "That which to him was a great evil, to be carefully shunned, was to me a great good, to be diligently sought; and the argument which he so warmly urged, against my learning to read, only served to inspire me with a desire and determination to learn."

Slaves were generally treated better in the city than in the country. They were much better fed and clothed. There were exceptions. Down the street, Frederick tells of two young women slaves named Henrietta and Mary. Henrietta was about 22 and Mary was about 14. Frederick was often at the house where they lived. The head woman of the house, Mrs. Hamilton, sat in a large chair in the middle of the room. Hardly an hour passed by where Mrs. Hamilton would whip one of the two women with heavy cowskin and draw the blood. She constantly screamed at them. They rarely had full meals. Douglass said that Mary's head, neck, and shoulders were "literally cut to pieces." He said that these two women were among the most disfigured and weakened people he had ever seen.

Douglass frequently felt Mary's head. He found it covered with sores that were forming pus. They looked infected. Mrs. Hamilton kicked Mary so often kicked and cut her to pieces that she was called "pecked" more often than her name.

Slavery proved as damaging to Sophia, the wife of Hugh Auld, as it was to him. Sophia became more strongly opposed to Douglass learning to read than her husband. Douglass said that nothing made her angrier than seeing him with a newspaper. She would run up to him and with a furious look, snatch the paper from him. If Douglass was in a separate room for any long period of time, he would

be called at once to say what he was up to. Douglass writes, “Mistress, in teaching me the alphabet, had given me the *inch*, and no precaution could prevent me from taking the *ell*.”

Douglass became friends with all of the young white boys he met on the street. When he was sent on errands, he took his book with him, and finished the errand quickly in order to get a reading lesson in before his return. There was plenty of bread in the house where he lived. Douglass carried bread with him, and exchange bread for lessons from the poor white children, many of whom did not have enough to eat. Douglass was careful not to give away the names of the few children who helped him, because it was illegal to teach a slave to read at the time of the book’s publication. Douglass said to the boys that he wished he could be as free as they were. He said, “You will be free as soon as you are twenty-one, *but I am a slave for life!* Have not I as good a right to be free as you have?” His words troubled the boys. They would express much sympathy and console him with the hope that by some chance he would be free. Douglass was twelve years old.

The thought of being a slave for life began to haunt Douglass. He got a copy of a book called “The Columbian Orator.” In the book, there was a dialogue between a master and his slave. The slave ran away and was caught three times. The conversation took place right after the slave was captured the third time. The master made a whole argument on behalf of slavery. The slave replied with some smart and inspiring answers. The master voluntarily emancipated the slave.

Douglass also read religious speeches in favor of emancipation. He began thinking about the power of truth over the conscience of even a slave owner. The more he



read, the more he hated the people who made him a slave. He began to see them as a bunch of thieves who had gone to Africa and stolen many people from their homes. Sometimes he began to feel that learning to read was a curse rather than a blessing. He became aware of his horrible condition but did not have the solution. His thoughts tormented him.

Everything made him think about freedom. He says, "I saw nothing without seeing [freedom], I heard nothing without hearing it, and felt nothing without feeling it. It looked from every star, it smiled in every calm, breathed in every wind, and moved in every storm." He writes, "I often found myself regretting my own existence, and wishing myself dead; and but for the hope of being free, I have no doubt but that I should have killed myself, or done something for which I should have been killed."

Every once in a while, Douglass heard the term abolitionism thrown around. He writes, "If a slave ran away and succeeded in getting clear, or if a slave killed his master, set fire to a bar, or did any thing very wrong in the mind of a slaveholder, it was spoken as the fruit of *abolition*." It was a while before Douglass figured out what the word meant. One day he came across an article in the city newspaper about petitions for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade in the District of Colombia. From then on, he knew what abolition meant. Whenever he heard the term used, he drew closer to the person speaking those words.

One day Douglass helped two Irishmen unload stones from a boat on the pier. One of the men asked Douglass if he was a slave for life. He replied yes. The man seemed deeply upset. He said it was a pity that so fine a young person could be a slave for life. The two men

advised Douglass to run away to the North. White men were known to encourage slaves to escape. They then caught the slaves and returned them to their masters to get a reward. Because of this, Douglass pretended that he did not understand what they were saying. But since that day, he resolved to escape slavery.

When Douglass was working on a shipyard one day making wooden boats, he saw that the workers would put the letters “L, F, S,” and “A” on different wooden pieces. The wooden piece would get a certain letter depending on which part of the boat it was supposed to go to. The workers would write an “L” on a piece of wood ready for use on the left side. “L” stood for the term “larboard side,” which meant the left side of the boat. The piece would get an “S” if it was ready for use on the right side. “S” stood for “starboard side,” which was a term that meant the right side of the boat. The pieces were also marked with an “F,” meaning the “forward side,” or front side. Other pieces were marked with an “A,” meaning “aft,” or the furthest back part of a ship. Douglass, figuring out what the letters meant, immediately started copying them, and after a short period of time was able to write the four letters out by hand.

After that, when Douglass met any boy on the street who he knew that could write, he told the boy that he could write as well as they could! The boy would respond, “I don’t believe you. Let me see you try it.” And Douglass would make the four letters, “L, F, S,” and “A” and ask them to beat that. Douglass writes, “In this way I got a good many lessons in writing, which it is quite possible I should never have gotten in any other way. During this time, my copy-book was the board fence, brick wall, and pavement; my pen and ink was a lump of chalk.”

Douglass had already learned the alphabet, some three to four letter words, and a little bit about reading. These lessons taught him to write.

The other boy who lived in the house, the son of Sophia and Hugh Auld, began going to school. His name was Thomas. Thomas learned how to write and practiced writing out letters in a bunch of spelling books. The books allowed for writing individual letters in blank spaces. Thomas brought the books home, showed them to a few neighbors, and laid them aside. Every Monday afternoon, Sophia would go to a meeting at the school and leave Douglass in charge of the house. When she left, Douglass spent his time writing individual letters and words in the blank spaces left in Thomas's spelling books. He would copy what Thomas had written. He continued this practice until he could write like Thomas. After years of tiresome effort, Douglass finally succeeded in learning how to write!

## BACK TO THE PLANTATION

Douglass left the plantation he was born on around age five to live in Baltimore with Sophia and Hugh Auld. At around age ten or eleven, his old master, Captain Anthony, died. Lucretia was Captain Anthony's daughter. Hugh Auld was the brother of Lucretia's husband. When Douglass's old master, Captain Anthony, died, Douglass was sent back to the plantation he was born on. Douglass was to be valued with the other property. This moment brought up his feelings of hatred for slavery. Captain Anthony died without a will and had two living children, Lucretia and Andrew. Women and men, young and old, were to be evaluated with horses, sheep, and pigs.

The slaves feared being passed into Master Andrew's hands. He was a drunk who had already wasted much of his father's property. The slaves believed that if they were given to Andrew, he would eventually sell them to the Georgia traders, where slavery was even more horrible than in Maryland. All the slaves felt that they might as well be sold to Georgia traders immediately, rather than land in Andrew's possession.

Douglass received many less whippings than the slaves he was being evaluated with. A few days before, Master Andrew had grabbed Douglass's little brother by the throat, threw him on the ground, and with the heel of his boot stomped on his head until blood began flowing from his nose and his ears. After Master Andrew did that, he turned to Douglass and said that he meant to serve Douglass in that way one of these days. Luckily, Douglass ended up in Lucretia's hands. After staying on the plantation for about a month, he returned to Baltimore.

Not long after Douglass returned to Baltimore, both Lucretia and Andrew died. They did not leave any of their slaves to be free. Douglass's grandmother had served Captain Anthony from youth to old age. She was a source of wealth to him, and her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren were slaves on the plantation. She had twelve children. She had rocked Captain Anthony as a baby and took care of him as a child. At his death, she "wiped from his icy brow the cold death-sweat, and closed his eyes forever." Captain Anthony left her as a slave. She saw her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren divided up without being able to say a word.

Her present owners, seeing that she was old and was having trouble taking care of herself, took her to the woods and built a little hut for her. The hut had a little mud

chimney. They let her support herself there in isolation and loneliness. Her present owners were practically leaving her out in the middle of the woods to die. This was the grandmother who had taken care of Douglass as a child and many other young people. Douglass writes of his grandmother alone in the hut: “She stands – she sits – she staggers – she falls – she groans – she dies – and there are none of her children or grandchildren present, to wipe from her wrinkled brow the cold sweat of death, or to place beneath the sod her fallen remains.”

Douglass then became in the hands of Master Thomas, Lucretia’s husband. Two years after Lucretia’s death, Master Thomas remarried. Because a “misunderstanding” took place between Master Thomas and his brother Hugh in Baltimore, where Douglass was living, Master Thomas punished his brother by demanding Douglass return to him. In March of 1832, Douglass went to live with Master Thomas in a city called St. Michael’s. For the first time in seven years, he lived with not having enough to eat. He worked in the kitchen with his sister Eliza, his aunt Priscilla, and a young woman named Henny. Douglass and the other slaves had to beg and steal from the neighbors to have enough to eat. Yet Master Thomas always had enough food in storage.

While Douglass lived with his master in St. Michaels, there was a young white man who created a school to teach slaves to learn how to read the New Testament. After three classes, two local teachers showed up to the class with a group of people. They had sticks and started throwing things. This drove all of the slaves off and stopped more meetings from happening in the future.

Douglass’s master began attending Methodist meetings. This made his master crueler. The young woman

named Henny, whom Master Thomas owned, was crippled because she fell into the fire as a child. She burned herself horribly and after that her hands were burnt so badly that she could not use them. Master Thomas would tie her up, “whip her with a heavy cowskin upon her naked shoulders, causing the warm red blood to drip,” and in justification of the action would quote the Bible. He would say, “He that knoweth his master’s will, and doeth it not, shall be beaten with many stripes.”

Sometimes Master Thomas would keep Henny tied up for four or five hours at a time. In the early morning, he would tie her up and whip her before breakfast. Then he would leave, go to the store, come back at dinnertime, and whip her again. He whipped Henny in the same places that he already whipped her earlier that day. Once Master Thomas gave Henny away to his sister, but his sister did not want her. The sister returned Henny back to him. Master Thomas owned Henny’s mother as well. Finally Master Thomas let Henny go on a boat. Master Thomas said he “set her adrift to take care of herself,” meaning he left her helpless to starve and die.

Master Thomas said to Douglass that city life had “almost ruined” him. Douglass used to let his master’s horse run away to the neighboring farm. The farm was about five miles away. Then Douglass would have to go after it. He did this because he could always get something to eat from Master Hamilton, who lived there. Master Hamilton was Master Thomas’s father-in-law. Master Hamilton always gave his slaves enough to eat. Douglass never left that farm hungry, and even if he was supposed to be back quickly, he took his time.

## THE FIGHT WITH COVEY

Master Thomas said he would not tolerate Douglass's actions any longer. Douglass had been there nine months, and Master Thomas had given Douglass a number of strong whippings, but the whippings had no effect. Master Thomas said he was going to make Douglass "be broken" as a slave. Master Thomas lent Douglass to a man named Mr. Covey for a year. Mr. Covey was a poor farmer who had a reputation for breaking young slaves. Slave owners would rent their slaves to Mr. Covey.

Mr. Covey would pay slave owners the wages that the slave owners would be missing out on by giving their slaves to him for a period. Sometimes, the slave owners would give them their slaves for free for a period because of his reputation as a slave breaker. The slaves would prepare and cultivate Mr. Covey's land for crops. Mr. Covey could get young slaves to work on his land with ease because of reputation as a slave breaker. A young man who lived there told Douglass about Mr. Covey before he got there. Yet, Douglass was glad to leave Master Thomas's farm because he knew he would get enough to eat on Mr. Covey's farm. Douglass said that getting enough to eat "is not the smallest consideration to a hungry man."

In January 1<sup>st</sup> of 1834, Douglass went to live with Mr. Covey. For the first time in Douglass's life, he worked as a field hand at Mr. Covey's farm. Within one week, Mr. Covey gave Douglass a severe whipping, causing blood to run down his back. The wounds on Douglass's back raised ridges that formed into narrow raised bands, as large as Douglass's little finger.

Mr. Covey sent Douglass to the woods to get a load of wood on one of the coldest days in the month of January. He gave Douglass a pair of untrained oxen tied to a cart. Douglass was to ride in the cart and steer the oxen. Mr. Covey told Douglass that if the oxen started to run, he must hold on to the rope.

Douglass had never driven oxen before. As soon as they entered the woods, the oxen got scared and started running. They ran in a way that the cart banged against trees and went over tree stumps. Douglass said he expected at every moment that his brains would be smashed by violently striking the trees. They ran a considerable distance. Then the cart crashed into a tree and the oxen ended up entangled in a dense group of trees. The cart was shattered. Douglass says, "How I escaped death, I do not know."

After a lot of effort and a long time, Douglass got the cart to be standing up on its correct side. He got the oxen disentangled, and got the oxen again tied to the cart. He made it to the location with the chopped wood and loaded the cart heavily. He made it back out of the woods. Half the day had gone by.

Douglass stopped the oxen before the wooden gate to open it. As the gate was opening, the oxen started running again. Douglass could not get an opportunity to get a hold of the rope attached to them. The oxen rushed through the gate. The cart caught to the gate between the wheel and the body of the cart. The gate was torn to pieces. The oxen almost crushed Douglass against the gatepost. Douglass writes, "Thus twice, in one short day, I escaped death by the merest chance."

On his return, Douglass told Mr. Covey everything that happened. Mr. Covey ordered him to return to the



woods immediately. Douglass went with the cart. Mr. Covey followed behind him. As Douglass got into the woods, Mr. Covey told him to stop the cart. Mr. Covey told Douglass that he would teach him how to “trifle away” his time and break gates. Mr. Covey went to a tree and with his axe cut three large skinny flexible young branches. After trimming them with his pocketknife, he ordered Douglass to take off his clothes.

Douglass did not move. Mr. Covey repeated his order. Douglass did not move again. Douglass writes, “Upon this he rushed at me with the fierceness of a tiger, tore off my clothes, and lashed me till he had worn out his [branches], cutting me so savagely as to leave the marks visible for a long time after.”

Douglass lived with Mr. Covey for a year. During the first six months of that year, a week barely passed by where Douglass did not receive a whipping. His back was frequently sore. Douglass writes that at Mr. Covey’s, “I found myself even more awkward than a country boy appeared to be in a large city.” Douglass said that his awkwardness was almost always Mr. Covey’s excuse for whipping him. Douglass said that one would have to repeat the scene in the woods in their mind once a week to get a true idea of what his experience was with Mr. Covey in his first six months with him.

Mr. Covey worked the slaves on the farm what Douglass called “up to the point of endurance.” The slaves would be up and off to the field with their hoes and plowing teams by the first approach of daylight. Mr. Covey gave them enough to eat, but they often had less than five minutes to eat. They were often in the field from the first sign of daylight until the last ray of light had left them. They were worked in all weathers. It was never too hot or

too cold to work. There was never too much rain, wind, hail or snow to work in the field.

Mr. Covey was in bed in the afternoons. In the evening, he would come out to the field, ready to make threats, work in the field, and whip people. Mr. Covey was one of the few slave owners who did work with his hands. Because he worked in the field, Mr. Covey knew how much a man or a boy could do. There was no tricking him. The fieldwork went on in his absence. The slaves felt like Mr. Covey was always with them.

Mr. Covey often secretly approached the spot where the slaves worked. The slaves called Mr. Covey “the snake” among themselves. When they were at work in the cornfield, sometimes he would crawl up to them on his hands and knees to avoid being seen. At once, Mr. Covey would jump up and scream, “Ha, ha! Come, come! Dash on, dash on!” Because of this, it was never safe to stop working, even for a single minute. Douglass writes, “His comings were like a thief in the night. He appeared to us as being ever at hand. He was under every tree, behind every stump, in every bush, and at every window, on the plantation.”

Sometimes Mr. Covey mounted his horse and pretended like he was leaving for another city. He then left his horse tied up in the woods. Mr. Covey would crawl into the corner of a fence or behind a tree and watch the slaves until the sun went down.

Mr. Covey owned a woman named Caroline. He said he bought her to be “a breeder.” She was twenty years old and had already given birth to one child. After he bought her, he hired a man who was married named Mr. Samuel Harrison to live with Mr. Covey for one year. He would set Samuel up with Caroline every night in order for

her to have a child. Mr. Covey wanted more slaves to own. Douglass said that Caroline was “miserable.” At the end of the year, she gave birth to twins.

Douglass said that one of the worst times of his life as a slave was during the first six months of his time with Mr. Covey. He writes on his condition:

I was somewhat unmanageable when I first went there, but a few months of this discipline tamed me. Mr. Covey succeeded in breaking me. I was broken in body, soul, and spirit. My natural elasticity was crushed, my intellect languished, the disposition to read departed, the cheerful spark that lingered about my eye died; the dark night of slavery closed in upon me; and behold a man transformed into a brute!

Sunday was Douglass’s only leisure time. He spent these days finding shade under a tree, drifting between being asleep and awake. Sometimes Douglass thought about killing himself and killing Mr. Covey. He said he was prevented from this by a combination of hope and fear. On his days off, he would sit at the Chesapeake Bay. He poured his heart out to the boats moving off into the ocean. The boats were not anchored or tied down. He wished to be free like them or to be on the boats. He would regret being born. He wondered why he was a slave. He dreamed of running away. He thought, “one hundred miles straight north, and I am free! Try it? Yes!” He proclaimed that he would not live and die a slave.

He dreamed of traveling in a canoe to Delaware and then into Pennsylvania, where he would not be

required to have a pass. He thought, "I am not the only slave in the world. Why should I fret? I can bear as much as any of them." He spoke to himself and made some crazy plan in one moment. In another moment he would reconcile himself to slavery and his horrible life, deciding not to do anything. This was severe depression.

The next period of Douglass's life was a turning point. He writes, "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man." In 1834, on one of the hottest days of the month of August, Douglass and three other slaves, William Hughes, Bill Smith, and Eli, were fanning wheat. They were outside in a yard in the sun. They had to separate the seeds from the outer covering and straw.

Douglass carried the wheat to the fan, which required a lot of strength, especially for one not used to this work. Mr. Covey told them that day if they finished the work an hour before sundown, then they would have an extra hour's rest. The slaves were working extra hard because they wanted to go fishing that day.

This turned out to be one of the worst days of Douglass's life. At about three o'clock, the sun was burning hot and there was no breeze. Douglass was seized with a violent headache, had extreme dizziness, and started shaking. He prepared himself mentally to keep going, feeling that he could never stop working. He continued walking unsteadily, as if about to fall, for as long as he could. Then he could not stand any longer. He fell. When he was on the ground, he felt like he was held down by a heavy weight. The fanning machine, which separated the seeds from the wheat, stopped. Everyone needed to do their part for the machine to keep working. Nobody could do the work of another person.

Mr. Covey, on hearing the fan stop, was about one hundred yards away. He came immediately. Mr. Covey hurriedly asked what the matter was. Bill said that Douglass was sick and that there was nobody to bring wheat to the fan. Meanwhile, Douglass had crawled away under the fence. He tried to get relief by getting out of the sun. The heat and the dust rising from the fan overwhelmed him. The hunching that was necessary to carry the wheat and the hurrying caused the blood to rush to Douglass's head. Mr. Covey asked where Douglass was. One of the people working there told him. Mr. Covey came to the spot. Mr. Covey stood over Douglass for a while. He stared at Douglass. Mr. Covey asked what the matter was. Douglass told him as best as he could what was the problem, but he barely had any strength to speak.

Mr. Covey then gave Douglass a hard kick in the side and yelled at him to get up. The kick gave a painful shock to Douglass's whole body. Douglass tried to get up, but in the middle of the attempt, fell. Mr. Covey kicked Douglass again. Mr. Covey told him to get up. Douglass stood at his feet. He tried to walk with his head and hunched over to pick up the tub that he was filling with wheat. He was moving too unsteadily and fell. Mr. Covey picked up a thin narrow piece of wood and said, "If you have got the headache I'll cure you."

Mr. Covey hit Douglass hard on the head. The hit made a large wound. The blood ran freely. Again Mr. Covey told Douglass to get up. Douglass made no reply. He decided that he was going to let Mr. Covey do his worst.

A short time after being hit, Douglass's head felt better. At this moment, he decided to walk seven miles to his master in St. Michaels to file a complaint and ask for

his protection. There was little hope for Master Thomas to intervene and make things better, considering the way Master Thomas had treated Douglass's cousin Henny and the fact that Master Thomas starved his slaves. Douglass was hoping that Master Thomas would not want his property to be beat up and disfigured. Walking seven miles was a hard task considering how Douglass was weak from being kicked and hit in the head. He was also exhausted and sick from the labor.

Douglass waited until Mr. Covey was looking in an opposite direction and then started for his master's house. This was a bold decision. If Douglass failed, the rest of his term of service with Mr. Covey was going to be made more difficult. Douglass got halfway across the field towards the woods. Mr. Covey realized he was gone, yelled "Come back! Come back!" Mr. Covey made threats.

The physical movement got his blood pumping. He started bleeding more heavily from his wound. Douglass made his way into the woods as fast as he could. Mr. Covey brought out his horse and saddled it, ready to pursue Douglass. Douglass thought he would be caught if he tried to take the road, so he kept to the woods. He kept far enough from the road to avoid being seen or heard, but close enough to the road to avoid getting lost.

Douglass did not get far before he ran out of energy. He fell down. He laid there for a considerable amount of time. He said he suffered more than words can describe. The blood was still flowing from the wound on his head. For a time, Douglass thought he was going to bleed to death. He believed that he would have bled to death, had it not been for the fact that his blood and hair tangled into a thick mass in a way that stopped the wound. After lying there for forty-five minutes, he forced himself

to get up. Douglass was likely still being pursued. He started walking through wet muddy ground and shrubs covered in sharp thorns. He was barefoot. He tore his feet at nearly every step. The journey was seven miles. After five hours, he arrived at his master's store. Douglass writes:

I then presented an appearance enough to affect any but a heart of iron. From the crown of my head to my feet, I was covered with blood. My hair was all clotted with dust and blood; my shirt was stiff with blood. My legs and feet were torn in sundry places with briers [shrubs] and thorns, and were also covered with blood. I suppose I looked like a man who had escaped a den of wild beasts, and barely escaped them.

In this state Douglass appeared before his master. He anxiously asked his master to intervene for his protection. Douglass told him everything that happened. His words, at times, appeared to affect his master emotionally. Then Master Thomas began pacing the floor. Master Thomas said that he expected Douglass deserved the treatment. Master Thomas did not believe Douglass was sick, only that he was trying to avoid work. He said Douglass's dizziness was laziness, and that Mr. Covey was right to beat him.

Master Thomas asked Douglass what he wanted him to do. Douglass knew that he could not claim to be innocent of any of the things Master Thomas said, because to disagree would be "impudence," meaning rudeness. Douglass writes, "The guilt of a slave was always and

everywhere presumed, and the innocence of the slaveholder, or employer, was always asserted.”

Douglass was silent and hesitant. Master Thomas calmed down a little. Master Thomas asked again what he wanted him to do. Douglass said to let him get a new home. Douglass said that if he lived with Mr. Covey, he would die with him. Douglass said that if he had to go back, “Covey will surely kill me; he was in a fair way for it.” Douglass said he would be ruined for future service if he went back to Mr. Covey’s farm.

Master Thomas said this was “nonsense.” He said he knew Mr. Covey, and that Mr. Covey would not kill him. He said there was no danger of that happening. Master Thomas said that Mr. Covey was a “good man.” Master Thomas said he could not think of taking Douglass from Mr. Covey. The most troubling thought to Master Thomas was that if he took Douglass back to his plantation and away from Mr. Covey, he would lose the whole year’s wages that Mr. Covey was supposed to pay Master Thomas for renting Douglass.

Master Thomas said Douglass belonged to Mr. Covey for one year and that Douglass must go back to him, whatever may happen if Douglass returns. Master Thomas said that Douglass must not trouble him with any more stories. Master Thomas said that if Douglass did not go home immediately, then he would whip Douglass himself. Douglass writes, “This was just what I expected when I found he had *prejudged* the case against me.”

After making this threat, Master Thomas gave Douglass a large amount of salts to swallow for healing. This was about the only medicine ever given to slaves. It was already somewhat late. Master Thomas told Douglass that he could remain in St. Michaels that night. Master



Thomas told Douglass that he must be back to Mr. Covey's in the early morning, and that if he did not, Master Thomas would whip him.

Douglass remained there for the night and could not fall asleep. He started back for Mr. Covey's in the morning. He did not eat any food that night or in the morning. His mind and body were worn down. At about nine in the morning, he reached Mr. Covey's plantation. Mr. Covey was hiding in the corner of a fence. Just as Douglass stepped into the field, Mr. Covey ran out with a cowskin and a rope, ready to give Douglass another whipping. Douglass was weak and had not eaten in nearly a full day.

Before Mr. Covey could reach him, Douglass ran to the cornfield. The corn was very high and Douglass could hide in it. Mr. Covey was very angry. Mr. Covey searched for Douglass a long time. Finally, Mr. Covey gave up, figuring that Douglass must come home at some point for something to eat. The blood was still on Douglass's clothes. Douglass writes, "I spent that day mostly in the woods, having the alternative before me, – to go home and be whipped to death, or to stay in the woods and be starved to death."

That night, Douglass laying down in the woods. A person was walking by. Douglass hid and stayed quiet. Then he realized the person was Sandy Jenkins, a slave that he knew. Sandy's wife was a free woman and lived four miles from Mr. Covey's farm. Sandy was on his way to see her and spend the Sunday Sabbath with her. Douglass told him his story. Sandy invited him to come with to his wife's home. If Douglass had been caught in Sandy's hut, Sandy would have faced thirty-nine lashes on his back. As they walked, Douglass talked the matter over

with Sandy. They arrived at the house around midnight. Douglass writes:

Sandy's wife was not behind in kindness; both seemed to esteem it a privilege to succor [give assistance to] me, for although I was hated by Covey and by my master I was loved by the colored people, because they thought I was hated for my knowledge, and persecuted because I was feared. I was the only slave in the region who could read or write.

There was another slave in the area that could read, but the person was quickly sold off to the far south shortly after coming into the neighborhood. Douglass had seen the man with his arms and legs tied up with iron chains, ready to be sold, like an animal for the slaughter. Douglass writes that after the man who could read was sold off, "My knowledge was now the pride of my brother slaves, and no doubt Sandy felt on that account something of the general interest in me."

When they arrived at the house, Sandy's wife made the food in a hurry. Douglass had been starving. They had ash-cakes, which were cornbread wrapped in cabbage leaves and baked in hot ashes. Douglass said that this meal was the best meal of his life. When they discussed what Douglass should do next, they decided against him running away, because slave catchers would be able to find him, whatever path he took.

Sandy was born in Africa. Douglass did not know to which religious system Sandy belonged. Sandy claimed to have magical powers. Sandy told Douglass, with much

seriousness, that he must go back to Mr. Covey. But Sandy told Douglass that before he went back, he must go with him into the woods, where there was a specific root they needed. If Douglass always carried it on his right side, it would be impossible for Mr. Covey or any other white man to whip him.

Sandy said he carried the root for years, and since then he never was hit. Sandy said he never expected to be hit while he was carrying it. At first Douglass rejected the idea, that simply putting a root in his pocket would stop him from being whipped. Douglass felt his intelligence prevented him from believing such a theory. Sandy said to Douglass that his “book-learning” did not keep Mr. Covey off him. Sandy convinced Douglass to keep the root, saying that it could do no harm, if it did not do any good. Douglass took the root and put it in his right pocket. Sandy told Douglass, when he returned to Mr. Covey, to walk up to the house bravely as if nothing happened.

On Sunday morning, Douglass began walking home. When he went through the gate at the yard, Mr. Covey came out with his wife on his way to church in their Sunday best. Mr. Covey spoke to Douglass kindly and told him to drive the pigs away from the nearby lot. Mr. Covey asked Douglass how he was. Mr. Covey continued to church. Douglass, at this point, really began to believe that Mr. Covey’s behavior was the influence of the root. However, it was Sunday, a day of worship.

On Monday morning, long before the sun went up, Mr. Covey called on Douglass to go rub, groom, and feed the horses. Douglass had made the decision to obey his orders, but if Mr. Covey was going to try to beat him, he was going to defend himself. Douglass’s religious beliefs told him not to resist slavery. However, because of the way

he had been treated in the last few days, he wrote, “my hands were no longer tied by my religion.”

Douglass went to the stable and began throwing down some blades from the loft, the floor directly under the roof. Just as Douglass was halfway up the steps of the loft, Mr. Covey snuck in, holding a long rope. Mr. Covey caught hold of Douglass’s legs and began trying to tie him up. As soon as Douglass realized what was happening, he jumped off the steps. Mr. Covey was still holding onto Douglass’s legs with the rope when he jumped off the steps. Mr. Covey forced Douglass to fall on the floor of the stable, lying with his arms and legs spread out. Douglass writes:

Mr. Covey seemed now to think he had me, and could do what he pleased; but at this moment – from whence [where] came the spirit I don’t know – I resolved to fight; and, suiting my action to the resolution, I seized Covey hard by the throat; and as I did so, I rose. He held on to me, and I to him. My resistance was so entirely unexpected, that Covey seemed taken all aback. He trembled like a leaf. This gave me assurance, and I held him uneasy, causing the blood to run where I touched him with the ends of my fingers.

Douglass said that just two days before, at a mean word from Mr. Covey, he would have shaken with fear. But now he developed the courage to fight. Mr. Covey held onto Douglass. They wrestled with each other. Douglass warded off every hit of Mr. Covey’s, although Douglass

did not hit back. Douglass was on the defensive and was trying to prevent himself from being injured, rather than injuring Mr. Covey.

Mr. Covey then said, "Are you going to resist, you scoundrel?" Douglass replied, "Yes, sir," while staring Mr. Covey in the eye and expecting to be hit again. Soon Mr. Covey called out to the man named Hughes for help. Hughes came and tried to tie Douglass's right hand, which was attached to Mr. Covey's neck. While Hughes was tying his hand, Douglass, who was still holding onto Mr. Covey's neck with a firm hand, waited for the right opportunity. He gave Hughes a hard kick right beneath his ribs. The kick weakened Hughes and he was bending over in pain. Hughes left the fight!

It was just Douglass and Mr. Covey. When Mr. Covey saw Hughes bending over in pain, his courage dropped. Mr. Covey was breathing in and out quickly, puffing and blowing. Mr. Covey asked Douglass if he meant to continue with his resistance. Douglass said that he did mean to continue, whatever the consequences may be. Douglass said Mr. Covey had used him like a brute for six months, and that he was determined to stand it no longer.

After that statement, Mr. Covey tried to shake Douglass and drag him to a stick that was lying just out of the stable door. Mr. Covey was trying to knock him down with the stick. As Mr. Covey leaned over to get the stick, Douglass seized him with both hands by the collar. Douglass brought him to the ground.

Then, the slave named Bill came home. Bill spent Sunday with his wife. Mr. Covey, holding onto Douglass, called upon Bill for help. Douglass said there was something funny about this scene. Bill pretended to be

ignorant of what he was supposed to do. Bill said, "What shall I do, Master Covey?" Mr. Covey cried, "Take hold of him! – take hold of him!" To take hold of someone means to whip them.

Bill tossed his head upward and said, "Indeed, Master Covey, I want to go to work." Mr. Covey replied, "This is your work. Take hold of him." Bill said, "My master hired me here to work, and not to help you whip Frederick." Then Douglass said, "Bill, don't put your hands on me." Bill replied, "My God, Frederick, I ain't goin' to tech ye." Bill left Mr. Covey and Douglass.

Next, Caroline, the slave woman owned by Mr. Covey, who had two children, came to where they were. She was a strong woman who could have easily overpowered Douglass. Douglass later recalled, "We were all in open rebellion that morning." Mr. Covey told Caroline to whip Douglass. Mr. Covey could treat her much worse than he had treated the other slaves, because he owned her. The man to whom Bill belonged did not allow his slaves to be beaten unless they were guilty of some crime which the law would punish. Mr. Covey later whipped Caroline for refusing to help him out in the fight.

The fight lasted two hours. Mr. Covey let go of Douglass, heavily out of breath, and said, "Now, you scoundrel, go to your work; I would not have whipped you half so hard if you had not resisted." However, Mr. Covey had not whipped Douglass at all. Douglass had not lost a single drop of blood in the fight.

During the last six months that Douglass lived with Mr. Covey after the fight, he never hit Douglass again. Sometimes Mr. Covey said he did not want to have to whip Douglass again. Douglass would then think to himself, "You had better not wish to get hold of me again, for you

will be likely to come off worse in a second fight than you did in the first.” Douglass writes:

This battle with Mr. Covey was the turning-point in my career as a slave. It rekindled within me a sense of my own manhood. It recalled the departed self-confidence, and inspired me again with a determination to be free. The gratification afforded by the triumph was a full compensation for whatever else might follow, even death itself. He only can understand the deep satisfaction which I experienced, who has himself repelled by force the bloody arm of slavery. I felt as I never felt before. It was a glorious resurrection, from the tomb of slavery, to the heaven of freedom. My long-crushed spirit rose, cowardice departed, bold defiance took its place; and I now resolved that, however long I might remain a slave in form, the day had passed forever when I could be a slave in fact. I did not hesitate to let it be known of me, that the white man who expected to succeed in whipping me, must also succeed in killing me.

Douglass also later wrote, in the third autobiography, about the fight, “I had reached the point at which I was *not afraid to die*.” Douglass was sixteen years old at this point in his life. For the remaining four years that Douglass lived as a slave, he got into several fights, but was never again whipped.

The law of Maryland said that a slave who resisted their master was to be hanged. In other cases, the slave was publicly whipped as an example to other slaves. Douglass was surprised that these things did not happen to him. He gave an explanation:

Mr. Covey enjoyed the most unbounded reputation for being a first-rate overseer and negro-breaker. It was of considerable importance to him. That reputation was at stake; and had he sent me – a boy about sixteen years old – to the public whipping-post, his reputation would have been lost; so to save his reputation, he suffered me to go unpunished.

Because of Mr. Covey's reputation, he was able to rent slaves at cheap rates. Hearing a story that he had tried to whip a young slave, got into a fight, and lost would be damaging to Mr. Covey in the eyes of the slaveholders. After the fight, at times, Douglass would work slower than the other slaves in the field, on purpose to provoke an attack. However, Mr. Covey never started another fight.

### THE ESCAPE ATTEMPT

Douglass left Mr. Covey in January of 1835. A man named Mr. Freeland employed him, only a few miles from St. Michael's. This man gave the slaves enough to eat and enough time to eat their meals. Douglass said his treatment from Mr. Freeland was "heavenly" compared to his treatment from Mr. Covey. Douglass talked to other slaves about the advantages of intelligence compared with



ignorance. He said that ignorance kept people in slavery. Douglass inspired them to learn how to read. They created a Sunday school.

Some of the slaves on the neighboring farms found out, and took advantage of the opportunity to learn to read. They found many used spelling books from their young masters or women head-of-households. Every Sunday, Douglass taught a class. When they started, nobody knew any letters. They tried to be as quiet as possible about it. They could be punished with thirty-nine lashes for trying to learn how to read. They held the school at first in the woods behind Mr. Freeland's barn, in the shade of the trees. Then a free black person who lived a few miles away allowed them to hold the school in a room at his house.

Douglass kept up the school nearly the whole year that he lived with Mr. Freeland. People were enthusiastic about wanting to learn how to read. There were people of all ages, although it was mostly adults. At one time, there were over forty people taking the class. Aside from the Sunday school, Douglass would spend three days a week during the winter teaching slaves how to read in their homes. Several of the people who came to the Sunday school learned how to read. Douglass writes:

I look back to those Sundays with an amount of pleasure not to be expressed. They were great days to my soul. The work of instructing my dear fellow-slaves was the sweetest engagement with which I was ever blessed. We loved each other, and to leave them at the close of the Sabbath was a severe cross indeed. When I think that these precious souls are to-day shut up in

the prison-house of slavery, my feelings overcome me, and I am almost ready to ask, "Does a righteous God govern the universe? And for what does he hold the thunders in his right hand, if not to smite the oppressor, and deliver the spoiled out of the hand of the spoiler?"

By escaping slavery and becoming an abolitionist leader, Douglass had to leave many people that he cared about. Douglass writes, "I never loved or confided in any people more than my fellow-slaves, and especially those with whom I lived at Mr. Freeland's. I believe we would have died for each other. We never undertook to do any thing, of any importance, without a mutual consultation." Douglass said that leaving these people was "intensely painful." At least one of those people, Douglass wrote in 1845, was able to escape slavery because Douglass taught them how to read.

One day, a few slave owners who were religious leaders in the community, including Master Thomas, rushed in to the class with sticks and stones and broke up the little Sunday school. They forbade another meeting and threatened to whip everyone. Douglass said that his blood would boil thinking about the way the school was broken up. Douglass said that the year went "smoothly", and he was not hit once. He writes, "I will give Mr. Freeland the credit of being the best master I ever had, *till I became my own master.*"

At the end of 1835, Mr. Freeland again hired Douglass from his master for the year 1836. Douglass writes, "I began to want to live *upon free land* as well as *with Freeland*; and I was no longer content, therefore, to

live with him or any other slaveholder.” He said, “Year after year had passed, and I was still a slave.” Douglass decided that the year 1836 would not pass without him making an attempt to escape slavery.

He decided he wanted to escape with his fellow slaves. He began brainstorming with his friends, first Henry, and then John. Even if they escaped, they could easily be returned to slavery. Then they would be treated “tenfold worse than before.” They had to consider the fact that they could face starvation, drowning in the water, or being chased by dogs. They experienced violent mental agitation thinking about the possibilities. Douglass writes about a potential scenario:

We were stung by scorpions, chased by wild beasts, bitten by snakes, and finally, after having nearly reached the desired spot – after swimming rivers, encountering wild beasts, sleeping in the woods, suffering hunger and nakedness – we were overtaken by our pursuers, and in our resistance, we were shot dead upon the spot!

Douglass, Henry Harris, John Harris, Henry Bailey, and Charles Roberts were the people in the group that made the plan to run away. Henry Bailey was Douglass’s uncle. Charles was married to Douglass’s aunt. Some of the men had different masters. They planned to take one of their master’s large canoes. One night during the Easter holidays, they wanted to paddle up the Chesapeake Bay. They wanted to use the North Star to guide them passed the Maryland border. After going about eighty miles, they were going to get rid of the canoe. They

hoped taking the water route would be easier, because traveling by land would lead to more stops and questions by white people.

The week before they wanted to leave, Douglass wrote fake passes signed by all their masters. The passes said that they were allowed to go to Baltimore for the Easter holidays. As they approached the deadline for their escape, they became more and more anxious. Douglass repeatedly tried to reassure everyone that they were making the right decision. He writes, “we had talked long enough; we were now ready to move; if not now, we never should be; and if we did not intend to move now, we had as well fold our arms, sit down, and acknowledge ourselves fit only to be slaves.”

The night before the planned escape, Douglass didn't sleep. The idea of escaping was originally Douglass's, and he was heading the whole thing. The next morning, while Douglass was working in the field, he got a bad feeling and feared that they had been betrayed. When the horn blew and they went to breakfast, Douglass went to the house. Just as he got there, he saw four white men on horseback. There were two black men tied behind them.

The men approached the house. When Douglass answered the door, they grabbed him, and tied his hands tightly together. The men told Douglass that he was in a difficult situation, and that he was to be questioned before his master. If the information was false, Douglass was not to be hurt. Then the men tied up John. When they tried to tie up Henry, he shouted, “I won't!” Two of the patrolmen pulled out their pistols. They swore that if he did not cross his hands to be tied up, they would kill him. Henry shouted, “Shoot me, shoot me! You can't kill me but once. Shoot, shoot – and be damned! *I won't be tied!*” With one

hit, Henry knocked both pistols out of the hands of the patrolmen. All four men jumped on him. They beat him. After struggling with Henry for a while, they tied him up.

During the fight, Douglass secretively took out his fake pass he wrote and threw it in the fire. The slaves who were planning the escape were not all tied. They were to be taken to jail. Before they left, the mother of Douglass's master came to the house. She gave Henry and John biscuits. She looked at Douglass and said, "*You devil! You yellow devil!* It was you that put it into the heads of Henry and John to run away."

The patrolmen were about to check for the fake passes at the moment that Henry fought back. The fight prevented the patrolmen from checking immediately. There was still no proof of an attempted escape. Douglass, both Henry's, John, and Charles were tied to the back of horses and dragged fifteen miles to go to jail. On the way, one of the Henry's asked Douglass what he should do with his pass. Douglass told him to eat it with his biscuit. The men passed the word around, saying, "*Own nothing!*"

On the way to jail, the patrolmen questioned everyone about their plans to run away. The men denied everything. It was unknown who told the slave owners about their plan. When they made it to jail, the sheriff put Henry Harris, John and Douglass in one cell, and Charles and Henry Bailey in another. After being in jail for twenty minutes, slave traders came in and asked if the men were for sale. The slave traders laughed, smiled, and said, "Ah, my boys! We have got you, haven't we?" The slave traders began making fun of Douglass and everyone.

Then the slave traders studied them, trying to figure out their worth. The slave traders asked Douglass and everyone if they would like to have them as their

masters. When the men did not reply, the slave traders began swearing and saying that they could get rid of the “devil” in the slaves if they owned them.

After the holidays were over, Mr. Freelance and another master came to the jail and took John, both Henry’s, and Charles out of jail. The masters brought them all home, except Douglass. Douglass thought that he was for sure going to be sold south. After remaining in prison for a week, Douglass’s master, Captain Auld, came and took Douglass out of jail. Captain Auld began speaking with another man about selling Douglass south into slavery in Alabama. Through a stroke of good fortune, Captain Auld changed his mind. Captain decided to send Douglass back to Baltimore, to live with his brother Hugh.

After being gone three years, Douglass returned to his home in Baltimore. Captain Auld sent Douglass away because white people in their community were angry with Douglass. Captain Auld was afraid Douglass was going to be killed. In Baltimore, Master Hugh hired Douglass out to work on building ships.

## LIFE IN THE NORTH

In the beginning of 1838, Douglass said that he grew “restless.” He felt that if he failed to escape this time, he would certainly be a slave for the rest of his life. He said, “On the third day of September, 1838, I left my chains, and succeeded in reaching New York without the slightest interruption of any kind.” Douglass did not give any details of his escape in his first autobiography, because he did not want to give slave owners clues as to how other slaves could escape slavery in the future.

When in the North, Douglass faced many experiences that were similar to an undocumented immigrant in America today. He writes:

I felt like one who had escaped a den of hungry lions. This state of mind, however, very soon subsided; and I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness. I was yet liable to be taken back, and subjected to all the tortures of slavery. This in itself was enough to damp the ardor of my enthusiasm. But the loneliness overcame me. There I was in the midst of thousands, and yet a perfect stranger; without home and without friends, in the midst of thousands of my own brethren — children of a common Father, and yet I dared not to unfold to any one of them my sad condition. I was afraid to speak to any one for fear of speaking to the wrong one, and thereby falling into the hands of money-loving kidnappers, whose business it was to lie in wait for the panting fugitive, as the ferocious beasts of the forest lie in wait for their prey. The motto which I adopted when I started from slavery was this — “Trust no man!” I saw in every white man an enemy, and in almost every colored man cause for distrust. It was a most painful situation; and, to understand it, one must needs experience it, or imagine himself in similar circumstances. Let him be a fugitive slave in a strange land — a

land given up to be the hunting-ground for slaveholders — whose inhabitants are legalized kidnappers — where he is every moment subjected to the terrible liability of being seized upon by his fellow-men, as the hideous crocodile seizes upon his prey! — I say, let him place himself in my situation — without home or friends — without money or credit — wanting shelter, and no one to give it — wanting bread, and no money to buy it, — and at the same time let him feel that he is pursued by merciless men-hunters, and in total darkness as to what to do, where to go, or where to stay, — perfectly helpless both as to the means of defence and means of escape, — in the midst of plenty, yet suffering the terrible gnawings of hunger, — in the midst of houses, yet having no home, — among fellow-men, yet feeling as if in the midst of wild beasts, whose greediness to swallow up the trembling and half-famished fugitive is only equalled by that with which the monsters of the deep swallow up the helpless fish upon which they subsist, — I say, let him be placed in this most trying situation, — the situation in which I was placed, — then, and not till then, will he fully appreciate the hardships of, and know how to sympathize with, the toil-worn and whip-scarred fugitive slave.



After a short period of time, Douglass stayed in the home of a free black abolitionist named Mr. David Ruggles. Ruggles had experience helping many fugitive slaves escape slavery. He had recently been arrested for harboring another fugitive slave from Arkansas. When he was in Baltimore, Douglass met an abolitionist woman named Anna. They later got married. Their marriage lasted forty-four years and they had five children.

With the help of abolitionists, Douglass and Anna made it to New Bedford, Massachusetts. A few months later, someone gave a copy of the *liberator*, an abolitionist newspaper, to Douglass. He writes:

The paper became my meat and my drink.  
My soul was set all on fire. It's sympathy  
for my brethren in bonds - it's scathing  
denunciations of slaveholders - it's faithful  
exposures of slavery - and it's powerful  
attacks upon. The upholders of the  
institution - sent a thrill of joy through my  
soul, such as I had never felt before!

Douglass began attending anti-slavery meetings. One day, while attending an anti-slavery convention in Nantucket, Massachusetts, Douglass got up and decided to say a few words. He said, "From that time until now, I have been engaged in pleading the cause of my brethren - with what success, and with what devotion, I leave those acquainted with my labors to decide."

## CONCLUSION

Frederick Douglass published his *Narrative* in 1845 as a political attack on the institution of slavery. He wrote the book to awaken the abolitionist movement in the United States and to expose the cruel and dehumanizing character of slavery. During the Civil War, Douglass became an advisor to Abraham Lincoln. He recruited black soldiers to join the 54th Massachusetts Regiment. Many former slaves who had escaped slavery and fled to the North participated in this regiment to fight to end slavery. Douglass's personal account of life under slavery was the autobiography that was the most influential on the abolitionist movement. There is not a life that we can learn more from about overcoming depression, facing our fears, refusing to be bullied into silence, and dedicating one's life to overcoming a system of oppression that goes against human nature.

## 2

### **Civil War in the United States**

The American Civil War is one of the most momentous events of history. In American history, the war had far-reaching consequences for domestic life; in world history, the war is noteworthy for the abrupt way in which slavery ended. Two fundamentally differing societies – one slave, one free – managed to coexist for decades within one nation. These contradictory societal forms of labor did not last, as the election of Abraham Lincoln propelled the nation into civil war. The results of which distinctly changed life in the United States for many, especially the four million people previously enslaved. With effects of revolutionary proportions, the question remains as to whether the American Civil War was a “capitalistic” or democratic revolution. The Civil War was both a capitalist revolution, in that contending economic interests clashed to produce the dominance of one over the other, and a democratic revolution, in that the emancipated slaves obtained freedom through radical means.

The Civil War was first and foremost a conflict between two capitalist systems, the North rooted in industry, the South tied to plantation agriculture. The North relied on free labor, while the South developed its wealth through the use of slavery. According to historian Barrington Moore, plantation agriculture was a “special form of capitalism that spawned a value system and an

ideology that glorified hereditary privilege, racial caste, and slavery while it rejected bourgeois conceptions of equality of opportunity, free labor and social mobility.” Therefore, the Civil War was a struggle between two distinct economic institutions, each with their own inherent “capitalistic” features.

Since the war was a conflict between two contending systems, it naturally follows that the North’s victory and subsequent national domination over the South should be termed a capitalist revolution. There is a plethora of evidence to prove that the Civil War constituted an overthrowing of the existing political order in the South. To begin with, the total value of North wealth increased by 50 percent during the 1860s, while the total value of Southern wealth decreased by 60 percent. In terms of power through wealth, the North’s increased substantially and the South’s decreased. This is also evident by the “property” that the South lost through the emancipation of slaves, amounting to three billion dollars in the 1860s, and undoubtedly valuing in the trillions today. On an exorbitant level, the North gained, and the South lost.

Additionally, the northern capitalist class used its newly acquired domination of the country to pass a spate of valuable economic reforms. Up until the start of the Civil War, the Republican Party tried to use the government to develop economically, through measures such as tariffs, centralized banking, and investment in transportation and education. However, the Democratic Party, dominated by the South, stymied these efforts. James McPherson writes about how the war enabled Republican measures:

During the war, Republicans passed them all: a higher tariff in 1861; a homestead act, a land-grant college act, and a Pacific railroad act providing loans and land grants for a transcontinental railroad in 1862; and a national banking act in 1863, which . . . gave the national government effective control over the nation's currency for the first time.

This “blitz of laws” fundamentally changed the role of the government, giving it a much more active role in the economy. This definitively marks a “capitalistic” revolution, with the North exercising a powerful new dominance over the nation.

Whereas the Civil War changed the nature of capitalism in the United States, it also revolutionized American democracy by granting rights and liberties to former slaves. With change taking place on many levels, it is important not to lose sight of the “internal revolution: the emancipation of four million slaves, their elevation to civic and political equality with whites, and the destruction of the old ruling class in the South.” The per capita income of black people increased from 23 percent of white's income under slavery to 52 percent by 1880. While this may appear to be insubstantial because Southern society experienced drastic losses during the war, it is necessary to note that compared to any other point in American history, this was a genuine gain for black people. Similarly, it would be wrong to discredit this information – due to the subsequent failures of Reconstruction – because one has the advantage of looking at history in

retrospect. At this point in history, these gains marked definite improvement among black people in the South.

Slaves not only obtained new freedoms after the Civil War, but also struggled for these freedoms and made the crucial difference. In 1861, the Union exercised a circumspect strategy regarding slavery. For the most part, they would only accept fugitive slaves into their camps if their masters were disloyal to the Union. Slaves directly challenged this policy:

Although national law and military policy provided only a small opening by which slaves might gain liberty, they struggled to enlarge it. Their determination awakened field officers to the possibility of employing black men on behalf of the Union, a possibility that seemed increasingly reasonable, if not essential, in the fact of the slave-built breastworks and slave-supplied armies of the Confederacy.

By the summer of the next year, there was a significant increase in the number of slaves and free-black people laboring for the Union. Almost all army posts, supply depots, wood yards, and naval vessels used a group of black men to provide valuable work. The increased dependence on black labor helped enlarge support for emancipation in the North. "Abolitionists publicized the role of black laborers, arguing that their service to the Union made them worthy of freedom and citizenship." Without the effort of slaves and free-black people, the North would not have had as nearly as strong of an impetus to move in the direction of unconditional emancipation.

Black soldiers also played a very important role in influencing Union policy. “By the war’s end, nearly 179,000 – the overwhelming majority slaves – had entered the Union army, and another 10,000 had served in the navy.” The large contingent of black soldiers had such a “destructive impact on slavery that they sometimes frightened their own commanders.” In one instance, a general asked to be “relieved of his first command of black troops from fear that they would incite a general slave revolt.” Furthermore, towards the end of the war, the enlistment of black men from the border states was so high, that it produced a “massive drain of able-bodied men” and dealt a “death blow” to slavery in these areas. Black agency played a crucial role in determining the democratic nature of the revolution. It has already been established that civic and political rights for black people significantly improved in the aftermath of the war. That alone is not enough for the Civil War to be termed a democratic revolution. Democracy is not only about people obtaining more liberty, but it *necessitates* that people actively engage in the struggle for freedom. As Frederick Douglass said, “Power concedes nothing without a demand.”

The Civil War can rightly be called a democratic revolution principally because black people themselves demanded and obtained their freedom. This revolution had concrete postwar democratic results. To demonstrate the degree to which blacks achieved freedom, one should look at the short-lived, yet significant Special Field Order 15. In January of 1865, after meeting with black leaders in Savannah, General William Sherman issued Special Field Order 15, which reserved up to 40 acres of land in parts of South Carolina and Georgia exclusively for black people.

In describing how this came about, Ira Berlin writes that after Sherman's march through the South, the "mass of black refugees who crowded upon his ranks provoked Sherman to bestow upon them a gift . . . with far-reaching consequences for postwar reconstruction." Firstly, within the context of world history, this type of emancipation is unimaginable. Normally, the slave owners would have been thoroughly compensated for their loss of "property", and in this instance, the reverse happened. Special Field Order 15 shows the extent to which the Union's stance on emancipation changed radically. Black people played an important part, pushing Sherman to make this order, and that unequivocally demonstrates democracy in action.

This is again evident in the active role blacks took after the Civil War. "Reconstruction legislatures established public schools for blacks, for the first time, and enacted laws to enhance and protect their economic opportunities and rights." The strong presence of the national government for a time helped protect against "counterrevolutionary terror by the Ku Klux Klan and other armed auxiliaries of the Democratic party." Additionally, black people held a higher fraction of public offices than they do today. Through active organization and resistance, they not only pushed the Union towards emancipation, but also engaged in many newly acquired democratic freedoms such as public education and office.

All in all, the American Civil War was both a "capitalistic" and democratic revolution. It was a conflict between two different systems, one based on industry, the other based on plantation agriculture. The North's victory over the South led to their national domination, acquiring significant new powers and greater wealth. During the war, slaves and free blacks mobilized, and this made a crucial



difference not only in helping the North to succeed, but in also pushing the Union to pursue an unconditional policy of emancipation. This was evident with changes that took place during and after the war, as blacks exercised rights and freedoms that would not have been possible under the previous government. The American Civil War, as a moment in history, has definite meaning for what is possible when people fight for change.

### 3

## Reconstruction

The Civil War was a revolutionary moment in American history. Slavery, a contentious issue that ignited Southern secession, became intertwined with the Unionist cause throughout the course of the war. The resulting emancipation was unparalleled in its rapidity and audacity, with the significant exception of Haiti. Slave holders were stripped of their “property” without compensation, a clear deviation from historical norm. Around the world, when slave-based societies experienced emancipation, they too went through periods of considerable change. However, the breadth and strength of these reforms were ultimately undone as almost everywhere the plantation systems survived the dismantling of slavery. A comparative analysis of emancipation shows that although for a time Reconstruction in the United States radically changed the conditions of former slaves, struggles for freedom around the world were for the most part ultimately unsuccessful.

Emancipation was first and foremost a struggle between slaves and planter elites. British and American policymakers believed the most important task in the process of emancipation was “compelling the ‘voluntary’ transformation of slaves into wage laborers” in order to continue the production of resources and maintenance of profits. Developing bourgeois values: “regularity, punctuality, sobriety, frugality, and economic rationality,”

became crucial. At the heart of these issues was the inability to reconcile slaves' attempts to own their labor with efforts from the aristocracy to continue their dominance over these newly emancipated peoples. It is the struggle between these two groups for "freedom and the control of labor that unites the experience of the American South with that of other post emancipation societies." Quelling the tensions between classes necessitated gains and losses on both sides.

Former slaves resisted subjugation to needs of the dominant class. Thomas C. Holt describes the similarity between Jamaican and American emancipation: "In both societies freedmen strongly resisted working for wages, preferring task systems and tenant arrangements that left them in apparent, and sometimes substantial, control of their labor." Slaves clung to the belief that "freedom involved some measure of personal autonomy, the ability to make choices about one's life and destiny." Part of emancipated slaves' efforts at resistance involved keeping families together, forming churches, and developing communities. This is a form of cultural resistance – Antonio Gramsci first theorized the concept of cultural hegemony in which the ideas of a ruling class come to be seen as the norm. By creating alternative social forms, the ex-slaves attempted to create independence from the plantation, a challenge to the dominant order.

During Reconstruction, state and local efforts to transform the conditions of ex-slaves – strengthened by Republican radicalism – contributed to significant changes in American society for a brief period. According to Eric Foner, "Nowhere else did blacks achieve a comparable degree of political influence after the end of slavery." It transformed the role of the state for freedmen, creating "a

form of leverage their counterparts in other societies did not possess.” Reconstruction led to the creation of public education, protection from the law, and higher participation in the political process for African Americans. Emancipation in both the United States and Haiti was far-reaching and bold in terms of consequences for ex-slaves. Both resulted from major wars fought over the future of the territories and led to the catastrophic destruction of plantation society. In a comparative context, it is evident that Reconstruction brought unique levels of freedom to African Americans for a time.

This contrasts with other examples in the British Caribbean. Foner writes about emancipation in Jamaica: “The indigenous mulatto class, unlike its counterpart in American Reconstruction, made little initial effort to mobilize the freedmen for political purposes.” The process of emancipation was much less radical in the British Caribbean. Holt further describes what occurred:

British West Indian planters, however, were paid compensation totally £20 million sterling for their slave property and enjoyed an official four-year transition period between the abolition of legal slavery on August 1, 1834, and the complete emancipation of their workers on August 1, 1838.

In the United States, slave owners were not compensated for their loss of “property” and there was no transition period. In comparison, Reconstruction appears as an episode of revolutionary change.

Whereas Reconstruction drastically challenged the traditional order in American society, its ultimate collapse aligns it with unsuccessful emancipatory endeavors around the world. As Foner notes, “almost everywhere, with the notable exception of Haiti, the plantation system did, in one way or another, survive the end of slavery.” As previously mentioned, governments and planter elites attempted to create wage-laborers out of former slaves. The court case *Appling v. Odum* in 1872 set a precedent in the United States, and “defined the sharecropper simply as a wage worker, with no control of the land during the term of his lease, and no right to a portion of the crop until division.” Conflicts over contract rights, tenancy, and liens all characterized legal struggles for power in the aftermath of emancipation. Lord Glenelg, the British colonial secretary during emancipation in the West Indies decided that policy should be to “unnaturally elevate the price of public lands so as to keep it ‘out of reach of persons without capital.’” The successful efforts to keep ex-slaves in subordinate positions after emancipation accounted for the failure of the struggle for freedom.

After emancipation, a string of laws criminalized many aspects of black life. In the British Caribbean, “the planter-dominated legislatures enacted a series of laws regulating labor not unlike the South’s later Black Codes.” For instance, they created strict vagrancy laws, violations of which led to imprisonment. Draconian laws – against “insubordination,” larceny, or loitering that could lead to punishment through lashes – were enacted briefly, although the legislature removed them after London did not approve because of their similarity to conditions under slavery. In the United States, “the criminal law emerged as a means of enforcing the property rights and demands for

labor discipline of the landowner against the claims of the former slave.” Theft was widespread during slavery, as many blacks felt they had a “right” to steal from their masters. After Reconstruction, laws enacted took an ardent stance on petty theft, allowing for imprisonment as a just punishment. Douglas A. Blackmon’s groundbreaking book, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to WWII*, exposes the horrific, slave-like treatment of blacks who were imprisoned for a variety of crimes after Reconstruction. Ultimately, these laws are part of the terrible, reactionary legacy of this period.

Tax policies took a similar, significant role. Foner explains how in the Caribbean, “taxation was also employed to limit the freedmen’s access to land, to restrict the economic progress of the peasantry, and to induce blacks to labor for wages.” Taxes targeted goods that proved to be vital to peasant agriculture: food, animals, wagons, etc. In the United States, tax laws enacted during Reconstruction that progressively attempted to shift wealth downward were reversed, putting a large burden on ex-slaves. “The result was that throughout the post-Reconstruction South, as in the post emancipation Caribbean, the poor bore the heaviest burden of taxation and received the fewest public services.” Tax laws contributed to the regression that took place in the aftermath of emancipation.

A new racism emerged with these structural shifts. In both the United States and the Caribbean, “an initial period of genuine concern for the well-being of the former slaves, tempered however by a commitment to the continuation of export-oriented agriculture, was succeeded by growing indifference or outright hostility concerning

the freedmen.” In the 1840s and 1850s, “both the humanitarian spirit and British interest in the colonies faded.” Interestingly enough, Karl Marx’s interest in the Civil War faded after emancipation, around the time when problems arose that merited serious attention. The official date of the birth of a new virulent racism in the United States should be dated around 1890 – after which, African Americans experienced flagrant degradations in their daily life. Segregation practices became more widespread, lynching increased, and the Republican Party abandoned the cause of anti-racism. A new, mutated form of racism arose from the breakdown of efforts to improve the status of ex-slaves in the United States and the British Caribbean.

Through a comparative analysis of the dismantling of slavery, it has been shown that although Reconstruction was a sweeping moment in American history, the ultimate collapse of efforts to uplift the status of ex-slaves unites it with the experiences of abolition everywhere. Emancipation was primarily a struggle between classes, evidenced by the depth of the resistance of the slaves. In the United States, Reconstruction radically changed American society for a time, and for this reason it highly contrasts with the most other narratives of abolition. Unfortunately, in the end, the struggle for freedom led to a period of reaction, which witnessed the criminalization of many activities of black life and the institution of brutal tax policies. This new racism was significant in that it survived emancipation, and showed to be powerful and persistent, with effects to this day. The lessons of emancipation show that it is dangerous when periods of change in history break down and lose steam. It is in this respect, that Reconstruction truly merits the title of “America’s unfinished revolution.”

## 4

**Abraham Lincoln and His Depression**

Lincoln had a significantly different life than most of the elected politicians in the United States. He was very poor. He was born in Kentucky, but his family moved to Indiana when he was young, partly because they had land difficulties but also because they did not want to live in a slave state. His parents were antislavery. His dad could not read. On his father's land, Lincoln cut down trees, dug up tree stumps, built fences, plowed, weeded, and planted plants. Lincoln's family was in debt to their neighbors. To satisfy this debt, Lincoln butchered hogs, dug wells, and cleared land for his neighbors. He did not have a privileged upbringing. He barely went to school, but he loved to read and when he did get his hands on a book, he would spend all of his time reading it.

One of the most interesting parts of Lincoln's early life was his depression, including a really horrible plunge in 1841. This was when he was thirty two years old. Many people who knew Lincoln said he was a very sad person, and would only liven up and look happier when he was telling stories. There were four things that contributed to Lincoln's depression in 1841. First, he was serving his fourth term in the Illinois House of Representatives. During his time in the legislature, he pushed a lot of internal improvement projects. When the economic crisis of 1837 hit, he received a large share of the blame for the



state's bankruptcy because the internal improvement projects were very expensive.

In response, Lincoln decided his fourth term in the Illinois House would be his last one. Secondly, around this time, Lincoln's good friend, Joshua Speed, announced he was moving away from Illinois back to his family's plantation in Kentucky. This was one of Lincoln's best friends. They slept in the same bed for a few years. Speed's father had just died and his mother was grieving. Thirdly, Lincoln had doubts about his engagement to Mary Todd, the woman who he eventually ended up marrying and starting a family with. He told Mary that he did not love her. She started crying and then he started crying. After meeting with her a second time to end the engagement, he finally got the courage and did it. These first three circumstances all occurred close to the same time.

Fourthly, and most importantly, Lincoln faced a lot of death growing up. When he was nine, his mother Nancy Lincoln contracted "milk sickness," a disease from eating cow products when the cow has eaten a poisonous root. She slipped into a coma and died within weeks. Before Lincoln was nineteen, his older sister died during childbirth at age twenty. Lincoln had one other sibling, a younger brother, that was stillborn. The first woman that Lincoln fell in love with was named Ann Rutledge. She died at age twenty-two of a deadly fever, which was possibly typhoid. After her death, Lincoln became extremely depressed. He would take his gun and go wander off in the woods. Lincoln was a person who faced countless hours of crying alone and he knew the pain of loss. Lincoln faced experiences that were comparable on some level to people's experiences under slavery. This

made him a more compassionate person and a unique leader.

After he dissolved his engagement, found out about his best friend moving out of state, and faced his political failures as an elected politician, he stopped attending the Illinois legislature while he was still in office. This was in January of 1841. He stopped socializing with people. His friends worried that he was suicidal. Joshua Speed thought he "went crazy." His friends removed razors, knives, and other dangerous objects from his room.

At this time, Lincoln wrote a letter to his friend. He said:

I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better I can not tell; I awfully forebode [predict] I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better, it appears to me.

The movie *Lincoln* seemed to make the point that Lincoln remained calm and made critical decisions during the Civil War in many moments when his Cabinet and everyone around him was freaking out. His leadership ability must be partly a result of the emotional security that he built up inside of him during these difficult moments of his childhood and early years before he started a family with Mary Todd.

## 5

### **Race Myths in the Confederacy**

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected into office as the 16th president of the United States. His victory propelled the nation into civil war, igniting a conflict between two powerful nationalisms. As a topic of historical inquiry, the Confederacy is a point of much discussion and interest. Within its five year existence, this fledgling nation aroused a tremendous amount of passion and support among its citizens. One of the most fascinating features of this brief existence is the fact that, as a nation-state, the Confederacy was torn down piece by piece by Union nationalists after the war. During Reconstruction, the North proceeded to fundamentally alter southern society. Nationalism, however, has always had economic, political, and social components, and cannot simply be destroyed overnight. Even to this day, there are pro-Confederacy sentiments in the United States, many more than one might think. The unique, pervasive strength of Confederate nationalism provided the starting point for this paper's analysis.

Several moments during the Civil War show the intensity of southern nationalism. Firstly, the fact that eleven states seceded shows the fervor and religiosity with which these states defended the racial institution of slavery. Lincoln was not an abolitionist and it is nearly historical fact that, had the southern states remained in the

Union, slavery would have remained profitable for quite some time. Furthermore, vast numbers of whites enlisted to fight in the Confederacy, a clear testament to the attractiveness of fighting for the South. Towards the end of the war, in November of 1864, Jefferson Davis became concerned with the Confederacy's ability to win. He suggested to the public that slaves be used for "noncombat military service." This created uproar in southern society as evidenced by the response of a Mississippi Congressman when he said, "Even victory itself would be robbed of its glory if shared with slaves." Southern society was deeply entrenched in the use of slavery and this was inseparably connected to the Confederate cause.

This paper is about ethnic and racial articulations of Confederate identity. For the sake of analysis, in this paper *ethnic* nationalism generally refers to strong feelings among southern whites of a distinctive difference from northerners. *Racial* nationalism will refer to the strength with which poor and rich Confederate whites defended the institution of slavery. I am arguing that Confederate nationalism was predicated on ethnic and racial components that sought to categorize itself in strict opposition to Northern and black subjectivities. Southern elites created an ethnic mythology, misconstruing the history of English immigration to paint northerners and southerners as two distinct peoples. I am also looking at the role education played in the Confederacy as a means through which the nation-state produced the people. Specifically, I am concerned with the way textbooks functioned to teach children how to understand ethnic and racial identity. The Confederacy effectively created what Benedict Anderson has described as an "imagined political community." Questions of great historical importance

remain: What made non-slave-owning whites in the South so strongly embrace Confederate nationalism? How did ethnic and racial perceptions of themselves influence this?

Conceptually, this paper argues ethnicity and race are constructions. Competition among elites “precipitates ethnic conflicts.” These arise from “broader political and economic environments rather than from cultural values.” While there were certainly differences among northerners and southerners, it was primarily political goals among elites that led to the Civil War, rather than fundamental differences between North and South. As Charles Hale acknowledged in *Más Que Un Indio*, ethnicity is a flexible term of analysis. In his case, he decided to employ race because it “redirects the spotlight of analytical scrutiny toward those who are racially dominant.” Acknowledging the colossal influence of racialized thinking in American history, I have decided to employ race when analyzing views among white southerners that blacks were suited for slavery. As Etienne Balibar has argued, race “ethnicizes the social difference” and becomes “an expression of irreconcilable antagonisms” by dividing society into those that are “genuinely” and “falsely” national.” One could not defend the Confederacy without defending slavery; blacks were “falsely” national.

In *Wages of Whiteness*, David Roediger argued that whiteness was a way in which white workers dealt with wage labor and capitalist exploitation. By embracing whiteness, white workers gained at the expense of blacks. This paper argues that Confederate whites embraced a form of whiteness, seeking to benefit from a racialized system of labor that allowed them to work less than blacks. Along these lines, the concept of Herrenvolk democracy, or master-race democracy, is crucial. Some white

southerners believed that slavery was a foundation of white equality. Slave-owners maintained slavery because poor whites in the South believed that they had more in common with them than with enslaved blacks. A Georgia writer demonstrated the ubiquity of this racist thinking when he explained that, “It is better for the negro to serve the white man, than for one white man to serve another.” It is important to connect race to nationalism. Anderson argued that racism, by focusing on biological traits, “erases nation-ness by reducing the adversary to his biological physiognomy.” He argued that racism has its “origin in ideologies of class, rather than those of nation.” However, racism was a fundamental part of the Confederate nation-state. Nationalism is not modular in that it does not necessitate others having the opportunity to become part of a nation. Therefore, upholding a slave society allowed the Confederacy to embrace its nation-ness, and it was not of importance whether or not slaves belonged to a nation.

Before one delves into the ethnological mythology of the Confederacy, it is important to discuss an explanation for Confederate nationalism provided by Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene Genovese in *Fruits of Merchant Capital*. In the book, the Genoveses explain why non-slave-owning white southerners would support the Confederacy in the Civil War. While one should acknowledge the strength of southern nationalism, it is important keep its limitations in mind. One should not try to sketch it as an unopposed hegemonic power; southern unity was merely enough to “drag most of southern Unionists, with whatever misgivings, down the secessionist road.” Yeomen farmers and herdsmen supported the South as “a provincial rejection of an outside world that threatened to impinge on the culture as well as

the material interests of the local community.” Banking and commercial sectors threatened to gain control of the South’s industrial sector, possibly leading to new, potentially drastic changes in southern way of life. Slaveholders didn’t necessarily have to respect non-slave-owners’ way of life, they simply had to allow a degree of autonomy and they would be able to harbor more support than would aggressive Northern merchant capital.

This explanation – an important intervention in the literature of the Confederate nation-state – shows that locality aligned with plantation agriculture to produce the nation. It contributes to a discussion on ethnicity because, acknowledging that elites precipitate ethnic conflicts, it demonstrates that one point of unity among southerners was simply opposition to the North. This allowed the Confederacy to create a series of ethnological myths. Paul Brass, in *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Theory and Comparison*, defines a determining factor of ethnicity: “It is not actual descent that is considered essential to the definition of an ethnic group but a belief in a common descent.” This is merely to say that the construction of ethnicity requires a common mythology. Renan reminds us that nationalism involves forgetting to the point of “historical error.” In fact, forgetting “is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation.” Drew Gilpin Faust, in *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, describes the importance of differentiating northerners from southerners from the perspective of Confederate elites. “The creation of a unique Confederate culture thus involved self-conscious cultivation of special features of southern national character, for these could serve as justifications for political independence.” As regional divisions between the North and South grew, political discourse that

highlighted differences between the people of these two territories became more pervasive. This was especially difficult acknowledging that there were many extended families with relatives in both the North and the South. All in all, these barriers were not enough to prevent the collision of these nationalisms.

In June of 1860, before the war, an article appeared in the *Southern Literary Messenger*, entitled, "The Difference of Race Between the Northern and Southern People." The writer argued that "a contest of race" exists at the present moment and "broods impendingly over us as a nation." In describing the people of the Northern states, the author said that they were "more immediately descended of the English Puritans" and originally settled in Massachusetts to avoid religious persecution. The Puritans constituted "the common people of England" and "were descended of the ancient Britons and Saxons." These people "evinced no capacity for control," are "deeply religious" and "while loving liberty, they make the poorest republicans, and enjoy the least freedom." The author described these as "facts" that inexorably led to conflict. Northerners, "being devotional, they push their piety to extremes of fanaticism" and they "attack the interests of others, merely because those interests do not comport with *their* ideas of right."

On the other hand, the southern mind is "disposed to quiet and to gentleness" and comes to rational conclusions. Additionally, it is "capable of almost incredible effort, and equal to the highest flight of genius." The article continues along this line of racial difference and delves into more history. "The Southern States were settled and governed . . . by and under the direction of persons belonging to the blood and race of . . . Cavaliers."



The author claims that these were people who “directly descended from the Norman Barons of William the Conqueror,” a race distinguished “for its warlike and fearless character . . . renowned for its gallantry, its chivalry, its honour, its gentleness and its intellect.” Furthermore, the southern people of this race “sit to-day upon all the thrones of enlightened Europe and give law to the million. They are of that race who have [sic] established law, order and government over the earth.” This quite ambitious mythology even claimed that the people of the South were fit to rule those in the North.

Another article appeared in November of the next year in *DeBow's Review*, a prominent publication. The article argued that the Civil War was a conflict between northern and southern races. Continuing along the lines of creating an ethnic mythology, the author argued that the two groups of settlers – Puritans and Cavaliers – were as “unlike as it was possible for Englishmen to be.” Puritans were Anglo-Saxons while Cavaliers were Anglo-Normans. “The Saxon, sought the rigid climate of New England, and the other, the Norman, the genial and sunny South, as the proper spheres for their peculiar manifestations.”

Furthermore, Normans came to the land for many reasons; some in search of “golden El Dorado,” others “to enjoy the luxuriant climate and tropical vegetation of the New World in a spirit of romantic adventure.” Although slavery was prominent in the North for a time, it eventually declined and became extinct. During this time, all Normans who had been in the North, who had “an affinity with the institution of slavery,” followed it further south. All Saxons who had been in the South conveniently travelled to the North, “thus leaving the Saxon the exclusive master of the North and the Norman the master

of the South.” Many of these claims are simply ludicrous; it is common knowledge that the journey to the New World was an austere one and barely anybody could even travel for luxury or adventure. While these articles take up the language of race, one should think of these comments as pertaining to ethnicity.

Another important facet of these articles is their assertions about slavery. Both claim that conflicts between the Northern and Southern race show themselves through the conflict of slavery. The *DeBow's Review* article claimed that Norman southerners had a “peculiar capacity for *executive control*” and were “the only people on this continent who can properly control . . . this particular institution of slavery.” In this literature written by elites one sees clear justifications for the Confederate nation and slavery. Two distinct peoples should not be part of the same nation, logic goes. Furthermore, only the southern people were of high enough caliber to maintain rule over slaves. In these writings, a type of ethnic whiteness is being articulated. It is important to keep in mind that both northern and southern society held deeply racist views; the Civil War was a conflict over different types of racial regimes. While the common yeomen or herdsman southerner did not ascribe to these historical claims, it is no question that they believed that they were of a distinctly different blood than northerners.

Nonetheless, if one goes into detail over the *proposed* ethnic makeup of the Confederacy, one must look at the actual ethnic history. *Albion's Seed*, a book by David Hackett Fischer, is a superb illumination of the various folkways that made their way into the creation of American society. The book, a 1,000 page tome, analyzes the four waves of immigration that brought English

speaking peoples to the United States between 1629 and 1775. By analyzing the actual history, one can gain a deeper understanding into Renan's insight that nationalism involves forgetting, even to the point of "historical error." The second wave of immigration discussed in the book, which occurred between 1642 and 1675, is one that concerns this analysis. The majority of this immigration took place in the 1650's when a Puritan oligarchy gained political power in England and tried to impose its views upon people. Distressed cavaliers immigrated to Virginia for refuge from oppression, unlike the *DeBow's Review* article which had a plethora of erroneous explanations. The majority of cavaliers came from territory in the south and west in England. William Berkeley, one of the first immigrant cavaliers, ruled the colony of Virginia as governor for 35 years. During his time, he encouraged more cavaliers to travel to Virginia. This was done mainly to solidify his political rule, as he used these new immigrants for political appointments.

The culture of these people is quite interesting. These were an English people that "tended to be profoundly conservative in every sense – elitist, hierarchical, and strenuously hostile to social change." On the one hand, the cavaliers do fit the ideal of a people that rule other peoples. But on the other, much more significant hand, the cavaliers did not make up a veritable proportion of southern society; the evidence does not fit the claim. Although numbers are hard to obtain, the second large wave of immigration were three-fourths "humble people of lower rank," as Fischer describes them. They were, for the most part, indentured servants from the southern part of England. The cavaliers were restricted to areas near the coast in the Carolinas, Georgia and Virginia.

More important to the ethnic composition of the South was the fourth wave of English speaking immigrants, which occurred between 1717 and 1775. "In the border counties of England and Scotland and northern Ireland as well, the majority [of immigrants] were farmers and farm laborers who owned no land of their own, but worked as tenants and undertenants." Another portion of immigrants were "semiskilled craftsmen and petty traders." These various peoples – one can term Scots-Irish – generally came, not for freedom from religious persecution, but simply for a materially better life. Numerically, around 150,000 came from Northern Ireland, 75,000 came from west of Scotland, and 50,000 more came from the northern part of England. This group came to settle in the "back parts" of the country, which comprised both the North and the South. Their culture became dominant in a large amount of territory that ranged from the "highlands of Appalachia through much of the Old Southwest." In the 19th century these people settled in many states: southwestern Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, the Carolinas, Georgia, Kentucky and Tennessee.

The salient point is that there were a wide variety of ethnic groups that occupied parts of the backcountry. The crucial component of the argument from Confederate nationalists was that the Normans, or cavaliers, were the descendents of those who populated the South in the 1860s. Not only has it been established that their descendents did not make up the majority of southern society, but in fact, many immigrants that did make up the majority of southern society also existed in the North as well as the South. These historical facts were irrelevant to the Confederacy; the creation of the nation mandated the creation of its own fictitious history.

The final portion of analysis, the rest of this paper, is devoted to the topic of Confederate education. This area has always been of supreme importance to the nationalist; today, one of the first places that people turn if they want to change society's values is to the school. The reason is quite simple and complex at the same time: young minds are malleable. Bret Gustafson, in *New Languages of the State*, discussed how in Latin America, mass schooling was an integral part of the development of nation-states. He used the Foucauldian term of analysis: governmentality, which "refers to a form of power that circulates through the inculcation of discourses and routines aimed at promoting individualizing autonomous self-regulation." School systems, often hierarchical and bureaucratic, define and control appropriate knowledge for youth. Balibar has written that there is a close correlation between "national formation and the development of schools as 'popular' institutions." The Confederacy, in the few years of its existence, sought to define and control appropriate forms of knowledge. It attempted to create a national school system and teach people a code of moral values that harbored its own ethnicized and racialized thinking.

Leading up to the Civil War, education among Southerners was not an issue of utmost concern, but it was still contentious and characteristic of the larger conflict. Because the southern rural population was widely dispersed, the importance of primary and secondary forms of education was not given much emphasis. Regardless, education was a site of struggle for the southern nation-state. In 1854, a writer in the *Richmond Enquirer* described Harvard and Yale as a place of "political prostitution" for their southern sons. Southerners understood clearly the

importance of continuing to uphold racist justifications for slavery. A Mississippi clergyman complained that southern sons and daughters would return from education in the North “with their minds poisoned by fanatical teachings and influences against the institution of slavery.” Northern industry provided strong competition as a source of education; this infuriated southerners as it took away from the independence of the South.

Until the start of the war, all textbooks had been produced in the North. Some southerners even complained that there was an antislavery bias hidden in the texts. When the South seceded, they had a valuable opportunity to produce authentic tools of education for Confederate youth. It is no coincidence that a large, concerted effort was made among southern educators and the publication of Confederate textbooks began the first year of the war and continued through until 1865. Confederate school books fell into three categories: arithmetic books, primers and geographies. One publication described the effort to create Confederate readers for children as part of developing “our national character” because it was necessary to show “independence of Northern literature.” As this was during wartime, southern publishers were short on ink, paper and skilled printers. They “focused less on publishing magazines and books and more on instructional literature.” Nearly three-fourths of children’s books published in the Confederacy were made for education. Therefore, whereas there were real limitations to southern education, it remains a good point of historical and anthropological inquiry as to understanding the way the Confederate nation-state produced its citizens.

A Virginian promoting Confederation education said that southern society was “on the threshold of a new

civilization” and education was necessary to satisfy the “intellectual and moral wants of this new country.” At an address to a teacher’s convention in North Carolina in 1861, a speaker said in reference to education: “This is a struggle for national existence and independence....It is especially incumbent on us to encourage and foster a spirit of home enterprise and self-reliance.” The speaker continued, saying that the South needed to become a “free and self-governing nationality.” This type of language reinforces the theoretical framework provided earlier; education was necessary to maintain Confederate ideals.

One significant limitation to the use of textbooks and other supplies is the question of ubiquity and accessibility. As mentioned before, primary and secondary education was not a developed institution in the rural South. In seeking to understand this problematic point in this analysis, one can look at *Chrysalis*, a magazine that Zambian nationalists attempted to publish regularly for their nation. The problem with publishing this magazine was that an authentic “Zambianness” did not exist in the country, as it was plagued with a subaltern status in the global world order. Nonetheless, the writers of *Chrysalis* set out to create this publication, believing it to be crucial to national development. It must be stated that this literature could not speak for the majority of the people of the country. However, in settling this point of ambivalence, it should be argued that the magazine, like the Confederate textbooks, were – in a metaphorical sense – part of the fetus of the nation-state. As the title of the magazine purports, Zambian literature was in a chrysalis, a sheltered and undeveloped state. Therefore, in reconciling the historical reality with the project of the Confederate nation-state, one should acknowledge that textbooks were

part of a burgeoning effort to inculcate certain behaviors and beliefs into the youth, rather than part of a highly developed and functioning school system.

On the other hand, the literature published provides a range of points to analyze. One characteristic of Confederate education was undoubtedly hostility to the North. One textbook had removed what it had deemed to be “Yankee phrases.” Another entitled, *The Geographical Reader, for the Dixie Children*, tackled the war. It described the Confederacy at the present moment as a “sad country,” and told boys to remember that they should never “vote for a bad man to govern the country,” in reference to Lincoln’s ascent to the presidency. The book told children that throughout the course of the war, “thousands of lives have been lost, and the earth has been drenched with blood; but still Abraham is unable to conquer the ‘Rebels’ as he calls the South.” This type of language paradigmatically appeals to the timeless nature of the Confederate nation-state, whereas many thought that the South would not fall. It also paints the peoples in the North as aggressive and violent, surely responsible for the conflict for not allowing the Confederacy to “depart in peace.”

The *Confederate Speller* also explained the war to children. “Troops who en-ter a State with hos-tile purpose, are in-va-ders. Let all who are able, take up arms to drive them back.” Even the subject of arithmetic was not free from hatred of Yankees. “If one Confederate soldier kill [sic] 90 yankees, how many Yankees can 10 Confederate soldier kill?” and “If one Confederate soldier can whip 7 yankees, how many soldiers can whip 49 yankees?” Some books, such as Chamberlain Smith’s *Louisiana English Grammar*, were actually repackaged older books



originally produced in the North. But with new titles and prefaces, they were presented as improvements over northern methods. These instances, although few, point to the fictional nature of nationalism and the need to recreate something authentic in opposition to the ethnic other – in this case the northerners.

Textbooks socialized ideals about race and slavery, a crucial piece of morality in the Confederacy. The *Confederate States Speller and Reader* described its efforts as congruous with producing a “well-bred society.” Another book explained to children that slaves should not “be abused.” The book explained, “It is not a sin to own slaves, but it is a very great sin to treat them cruelly.” In this way, textbooks taught children that morality existed within the framework of owning slaves. This is one of the most pathological and violent features of whiteness; slaves are treated as property and there is no room for disagreement.

The geographical reader is most striking in its stance on race. It argues that Africans are found in Africa, where they are “slothful and vicious, but possess little cunning.” It then tells the reader that Africans are “better fed, better clothed, and better instructed than in their native country,” providing a rationalization for slavery. The book continues with a catechism that declares facts about the races of the world. In asking how many races there are, the correct response is five: the Caucasian, Indian, African, Malay, – described as “nearly black” – and the Mongolian. The reader then asks which race is “most civilized,” with the answer being the “Caucasian.” When it asks, “Which are the most ferocious and savage,” the reader responds with all of the others. These texts normalize racist thinking that puts whiteness at the top, when it could be argued that

parts of Confederate whiteness were “ferocious and savage.”

Lastly, these textbooks are of interest for their assertions on the proper use of language. In discussing education in *New Languages of the State*, Gustafson argues that language is a political marker that is necessary to “facilitate the conjuring of new concepts of geographic space, hierarchies and centers.” Balibar explains that language presupposes a “common code and even a common norm.” Language is necessary to produce ethnicity, and this is principally done through schooling. Anderson argues that language can function as an instrument of inclusion, as “anyone can learn any language.” In addition, the sharing of a common language makes the imagining of a nation possible. Therefore, it is highly significant that readers and spellers made suggestions about proper enunciation.

Faust describes what occurred. “Southern school texts argued ... for restoring a purity of diction that would lead white southerners toward their English linguistic roots and away from both Yankee degeneracies and what the texts called ‘Africanisms.’” Southerners were told to enunciate the last syllables of words. Instead of saying “mornin’,” one should say “morning”; instead of “objec’,” one should pronounce it “object.” Adelaide De Vendel Chaudron produced a reader that went through five editions and sold 40,000 copies during the war. In this book, Chaudron told readers to pronounce words in specific ways that were distinctly southern. “Poor, not pooah; matter, not mattuh; mother, not mothuh.” The book advises readers to “avoid Africanisms. The longer you indulge in their use, the more difficult you will find it to overcome the habit.” Words such as “Dis,” “Dat,” “Doe,”

and “Bofe,” were to be pronounced, “This,” “That,” “Though,” and “Both,” respectively. These suggestions were fundamentally political statements. The writer invoked racialized thinking to produce a Confederate ethnicity.

This paper sought to analyze the racial and ethnic components of Confederate nationalism. I described the intensity and uniqueness of nationalism in the Confederacy and sought to show that southern ethnicity was constructed as a political means. Southerners embraced their whiteness in a master-race democracy and obtained certain racial advantages. In the construction of ethnicity, Confederate elites created an ethnic mythology, claiming to be descendants of Norman cavaliers, people fit to rule the earth. Delving into the actual history showed that the ethnic composition of the Confederacy was diverse, and indubitably contravened the claims of Confederate elites.

The second major area of analysis was education. An analysis of textbooks showed that education inculcated ethnicized and racialized thinking into Confederate youth and provided numerous justifications for slavery. Even the use of language was political, as the readers encouraged southerners to use diction distinct from their slaves and from northerners. Conceptions of race and ethnicity were sturdily entwined with Confederate nationalism, so much so that they defined the southern way of life.

This paper was by no means an attempt at a full account of racialized and ethnicized thinking in the Confederacy. Many other areas of study remain as starting points for inquiries into Confederate nationalism. Religion – the most important one – was present in the literature on education and ethnic mythology, but because of its

breadth, it was not covered. Honor is another topic that permeated the South, and it still does today. Other, more specific areas include socialization of Confederate nationalism in the army, as well as an analysis of the hunting privileges for whites – an area that may play a bigger role than many would suspect. All in all, analyzing what could have been in the Confederacy shows the dangers of nationalism. We can all be thankful that this form of society did not come to be, but we must always strive to learn from this history, as it has much importance in today's world.

20<sup>th</sup> Century

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## 6

**The Montgomery Bus Boycott**

*“For hundreds of years Negroes had fought to stay alive by developing an endurance to hardship and heartbreak.”*

- Dr. King, *Where Do We Go From Here?*

In the Montgomery Bus Boycott, tens of thousands of black people boycotted segregated buses for over a year. Despite threats of violence, people coordinated a mass car pool and walked to work every day. The boycott nearly shut down public transportation in Montgomery and almost bankrupted the bus company. Thousands of people attended weekly mass meetings and ignored the lies of the Montgomery politicians, who tried to get them to stop protesting and tell them that their actions were not effective. Police harassed people and gave carpool drivers record numbers of traffic tickets for made up violations. Over a hundred boycott leaders were arrested under a law claiming that the boycott was illegal. Racists, in response to the boycott, bombed Martin Luther King's house, other ministers' houses, and black churches.

Within months, the boycott gained the attention of the Eisenhower administration and forced them to consider proposing new national civil rights legislation to the American Congress that had not been passed since

Reconstruction. After a year, the boycott pushed the U.S. Supreme Court to rule that Alabama's state and local laws requiring bus segregation were unconstitutional. The boycott began with the simple demand that a black person not be forced to give up their seat to a white person on a bus, even if the buses remained segregated. The boycott leaders, in the first months of the boycott, were not demanding integration. Throughout the year, the struggle escalated. By December 1956, the boycott won federal court ordered integration of the buses throughout Alabama.

## EARLY GRIEVANCES

In 1954, King became pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church around the time that the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that segregated schools were unconstitutional. Southern white politicians openly announced that they would not obey the court order. In Alabama, less than five percent of the black population was registered to vote. Riding the buses in Montgomery was a humiliating experience. Black people had to pay at the front of the bus, and then step off the bus, and enter at the back of the bus. Sometimes, after a black person had paid and stepped off the bus to go to the back, the bus driver would drive away.

On March 2nd, 1955, a black high school student named Claudette Colvin was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white person in Montgomery. She had just written a paper for school criticizing the ban against black people trying on clothing in department stores in the South. She was sitting in the middle of the bus. When a few white passengers got on, the bus driver demanded that she leave

her seat and stand for the rest of the ride. She refused. Three police officers came to the bus with a squad car. Colvin yelled that it was her constitutional right to be there. She later testified that at that time talking back to a white person was seen as worse than stealing. Colvin cried when the police told her she was under arrest. She struggled when the police dragged her off the bus and screamed when they put handcuffs on her. One white woman on the bus who witnessed the event said that if Colvin had been allowed to defy the police and keep her seat in that situation, then "they will take over."

Prosecutors charged her with assault, disorderly conduct, and violating the segregation law. A few months later a judge dropped the disorderly conduct and segregation charges but imposed a small fine for the assault charge. Members of an organization called the Women's Political Council in Montgomery and ministers had a meeting. The Women's Political Council had met with the city commissions before about bus segregation. The newly formed group chose not to challenge her case in the courts. She was pregnant and not married. Colvin's family paid the fine.

In August 1955, Emmett Till, a black fourteen-year-old boy, was murdered in Mississippi. This produced national outrage. In October in Montgomery, another black woman named Mary Louise Smith was arrested for refusing to give up her seat to a white person. E.D. Nixon was involved in responding to her arrest. He was president of the Alabama branch of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, one of the first major black trade unions. He argued for the decision not to pursue Smith's case, against the will of the Women's Political Council leaders. Smith's father was an alcoholic and her family lived in a shack in



the country. Nixon said that if a legal battle began and reporters came out to interview her family, “we wouldn’t have a leg to stand on.” He compared Smith to Claudette Colvin. He did not believe they could win the case because he did not believe that Smith could make a good impression on the white judges. Smith paid her \$9 fine.

## THE ARREST OF ROSA PARKS

On Thursday, December 1st, 1955, Rosa Parks was arrested. She was the secretary of the local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). When she was on the bus, the white bus driver got up and walked over to her row. He said to a row of four black passengers, “You better make it light on yourselves and let me have those seats.” Three people got up except Parks. She said she wasn’t in the white section and did not have to move. The bus driver said that the white section was where he said it was and that she was in it. She refused to leave. The bus driver said he was going to arrest her himself if he had to. She replied in a soft voice that she was not moving. The bus driver told her that he had emergency police power to enforce segregation codes and that she was under arrest. Parks was charged with violating the Alabama bus segregation laws.

When Parks’ husband found out she was in jail, he was afraid for her life. Parks got bailed out and consulted with E.D. Nixon and other activists. She decided to challenge the case with a lawsuit against segregation. Nixon believed she would make a good impression on the judges. When Parks told her husband about the campaign, he said to her, “The white folks will kill you, Rosa.”

The night of the arrest, the leader of the Women's Political Council, Jo Ann Robinson, a professor of English at Alabama State, called her friends in the organization. The women told their husbands they had to grade exams, and they met up around midnight at the offices of Alabama State. They wrote a flyer that said, "Another Negro woman has been arrested and thrown into jail because she refused to get up out of her seat on the bus and give it to a white person." The flyer said that Parks' case would come up on Monday and they asked every black person to stay off the buses on Monday in protest of Parks' arrest and trial. The boycott was only meant to be one day.

The women stayed up late into the night making tens of thousands of copies of the flyer. They used an old-fashioned printing machine that they had to crank slowly by hand. They printed three to a page and cut them in three. At three a.m., Robinson called Nixon and announced the boycott idea to him, which he said he liked. The women had written a call for the boycott before they had met with King, Nixon, and the other ministers. The next morning, King allowed his church Dexter to be used for a meeting of about fifty black leaders of Montgomery to plan the one-day boycott.

Over the weekend, hundreds of people went door to door and passed out flyers about the boycott. Volunteers distributed tens of thousands of flyers. Many Montgomery preachers made announcements to their congregations that Sunday. The local newspaper ran a story that Sunday about the boycott for the upcoming day.

On the day of the boycott, King drove around and saw empty buses and buses with only white people. Officers with helmets and shotguns followed around many of the buses in police cars. The police cars may have scared

away any black people that were actually intending to ride the buses that day. The police commissioner Clyde Sellers said that the boycott happened because black “goon squads” had intimidated other black passengers off the buses. The police felt pressure to prove that people were being intimidated off the buses. One 19-year-old college black student was arrested that day for helping an elderly woman into his car. At the courthouse, Parks was convicted, and the lawyers filed their notice that they were appealing the case. Five hundred black people filled the courthouse corridor, steps, and surrounding area. The police were there with shotguns looking nervous.

At the mass meeting that afternoon, Martin Luther King was elected president of the boycott organization. They selected the name the Montgomery Improvement Association. One speaker rose to suggest that the boycott should be suspended during the upcoming negotiations over the demands. They said the boycott was a success, but if they continued it people would get tired and filter back onto the buses, which would make white people laugh at the new boycott organization and they would not win any concessions. Other speakers supported the bad argument saying that it was better to preserve the boycott as a threat than to spoil it by overuse. The ministers leading the meeting pushed for the bad proposal to be decided on later before it could be passed at that moment. They said they wanted to allow more time for people to show up to the meeting that night.

Around five p.m., King went home and only had a few minutes to come up with a speech for that night. When he came back to the meeting later, over five thousand people showed up to the church! Only a small fraction of the people fit inside and loudspeakers were set up outside.

The crowd spanned blocks. Before entering the church, King said to his friend, "This could turn into something big."

When he was called to the pulpit, he could see people filling the seats and the balconies. People were sitting on the floor of the church, in the aisles, and peering in from the outside through the windows. King began his speech saying what had happened in the last couple days and describing the purpose of the boycott. He then said, "There comes a time when people get tired of being trampled over by the iron feet of oppression." This statement spoke to the mistreatment black people in Montgomery had been through. The crowd exploded into cheers and applause. King paused. When the roar seemed to weaken, a loud cheer came from the outside crowd to push the volume higher. People began stomping on the wooden floor of the church. One could feel the noise shaking the building.

King said, "There comes a time, my friends, when people get tired of being thrown across the abyss of humiliation, where they experience the bleakness of nagging despair. There comes a time when people get tired of being pushed out of the glittering sunlight of life's July, and left standing amidst the piercing chill of an Alpine November." The crowd interrupted him and drowned him out with noise at this point. He said, "My friends, don't let anybody make us feel that we are to be compared in our actions with the Ku Klux Klan or with the White Citizens Council. There will be no crosses burned at any bus stops in Montgomery. There will be no white persons pulled out of their homes and taken out on some distant road and lynched for not cooperating."

Later in the speech, King said, "If we are wrong – the Supreme Court of this nation is wrong." He began shouting and rocking back and forth. "If we are wrong – God Almighty is wrong!" The crowd drowned out the church with noise again. King said, "If we are wrong – Jesus of Nazareth was merely a utopian dreamer and never came down to earth! If we are wrong – justice is a lie." He had to wait some time for the crowd to quiet. "And we are determined here in Montgomery – to work and fight until justice runs down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream!" The members of the Dexter congregation had never seen him speak with such emotion before. The applause continued as King made his way out of the church, with people reaching to touch him. He was twenty-six at this point in his life. After his speech the crowd voted on a list of demands and voted to continue the boycott.

A few days later, a white woman librarian wrote a letter to the *Advertiser*, the local newspaper, that history was being made and warned Montgomery's white citizens against their hypocrisy. Young white people began to harass her, throw rocks through her windows, insult her on the streets, and play tricks on her at her work. A year later she committed suicide.

The main demand of the boycott was to allow the buses to be filled up from back to front by black people and from front to back by white people. This would eliminate the section reserved for white people. The boycotters wanted a compromise within segregation. The demand was moderate. The NAACP at this point viewed the boycott as a wildcat movement. They didn't pay much attention to it because they thought it was for something less than integration. At the same time, there were rumors among the white population of Montgomery that the

NAACP was secretly directing the boycott. Another rumor floating around was that a white reverend named Robert Graetz in Montgomery was the boycott's "hidden mastermind." The man had supported the boycott and was present at all the mass meetings.

The boycotters had to find ways to and from work. Many people were maids or day laborers. During rush hours, the sidewalks were often crowded with people. Sometimes there were rainstorms, car breakdowns, stranded relatives, and complicated relays in getting from home to work without being late or getting fired. Many people had to find a way to and from the grocery store, cooking and eating supper, dealing with children and housework, and then perhaps going back out into the night for a mass meeting. Every day the bus company was losing thirty to forty thousand fares. In the first week of the boycott, the Montgomery police commissioner dropped hints that any taxi drivers that charged less than the minimum forty-five cent fare would be arrested. Black taxi drivers had been charging an emergency ten cent fare.

On December 8th, the fourth day of the boycott, King called a minister who he knew from Baton Rouge, Louisiana. In the summer of 1953, the minister led a boycott against bus segregation in that city. The boycott lasted two weeks. In Baton Rouge, the authorities, in response to the boycott, banned the use of cheap and unlicensed taxi services. In response, the leaders of the Baton Rouge boycott organized a carpool. King got the idea to do the same. He announced the plan at the mass meeting that night in Montgomery. He said that people needed to volunteer their cars and drivers needed to volunteer to drive. The crowd approved the proposal enthusiastically with cheers. No money would be allowed

to change hands directly because of the ban on cheap taxi rates, but people were allowed to make donations to the MIA, and the MIA would subsidize the costs of the carpool. That night, more than 150 car owners signed up to lend their cars to the boycott.

## NEGOTIATIONS

That same day, December 8<sup>th</sup>, the first negotiating session took place between the three city commissioners, the bus company lawyer Jack Crenshaw, and the representatives of the MIA. The talks lasted four hours. The first talks were before a large crowd of reporters, boycotters, and spectators. The MIA demanded greater courtesy on the part of the bus drivers. Second, they wanted black drivers to be hired on the predominantly black routes. The third demand was for front-to-back and back-to-front seating. This would mean that black people would fill seats from the back to the front and white people would fill seats from the front to the back.

Other Alabama cities, such as Mobile, were already using the front-to-back and back-to-front seating policy. Montgomery's segregation ordinance specified that a black passenger could be compelled to give up their seat only if another one was available and not if they had to stand. This fact had been pointed out to the mayor and the bus company by Robinson, the leader of the Women's Political Council, a year before the boycott immediately after the Colvin arrest. But the city and bus company disagreed on the interpretation of the law. They claimed that the Montgomery segregation ordinance did give them the right to make a black person give up their seat to a white person. Regardless, it was within the power of the

city and the bus company to establish back-to-front and front-to-back seating.

The bus company lawyer rejected the demand for black drivers and said that was a matter of private enterprise. He said the MIA plan for bus seating was illegal. When Crenshaw leaned back to huddle with other white negotiators, King thought he heard him whisper that if the white people gave in on the third point then black people would go around bragging of a victory, which would be unacceptable. Crenshaw objected to the MIA seating proposal. He said that it could to a situation where a black man could be “practically rubbing knees” with a white woman.

At the negotiations on December 17<sup>th</sup>, King opened by saying that the MIA was no longer asking that the bus company hire black drivers immediately, just that the bus company accept applications with the intent of hiring when positions become available. A white minister commented that it was nearly impossible to conduct discussions while one side was inflicting damage on the other. He proposed that the MIA leaders first call off the boycott to establish an atmosphere favorable to negotiations. This was rejected. A white reverend named Henry Parker proposed that signs be installed in all buses assigning the first ten seats for white people and the last ten seats for black people. The seats in the middle could be filled by anyone. King and others strongly objected to the “White Only” signs, which had been eliminated from Montgomery buses twenty years before. The white delegation said that they disagreed with the MIA proposal around bus seating. They proposed a scenario where a bus was filled with black people and at a stop ten black people get off from scattered seats. If ten white people get on and take the scattered



seats, then the bus would not be segregated and would not be in compliance with the law.

On December 19<sup>th</sup>, there was another negotiating session. During negotiations, the secretary of the Montgomery branch of the racist organization, the White Citizens' Council, came and took a seat on the white side of the conference table. The man then stood up to speak. King jumped up to object that he was not a member of the negotiating committee. King said angrily, "Furthermore, we will never solve this problem so long as there are persons on the committee whose public pronouncements are anti-Negro." King's blood must have been pumping and his heart racing. He overcame great fear to make that statement.

Someone replied that the mayor had approved the man's presence. King said the mayor acted unfairly by not consulting the MIA representatives. Reverend Parker, the man who had suggested the "White Only" signs earlier, then said to King, "He has just as much right to be on this committee as you do. You have a definite point of view, and *you* are on it." Other white people criticized King for introducing hostility and mistrust into the meeting before the man from the White Citizens' Council had spoken a word. The black and white delegates began arguing. Neither side agreed to the other's proposals. Eventually King made a motion to recess. He said the whites had come to the meeting with "preconceived ideas." A white woman replied to King, "You are the one who has come here with preconceived ideas." King said he left the meeting with a "terrible sense of guilt." Later he called Reverend Parker and apologized for any of his comments that had given offense.

The boycott continued. In the mass meetings, women outnumbered men. Ministers who spoke at the meetings often pointed out women who walked and called them heroes. One minister said that he saw a group of women walking to work early one morning with pride and dignity that would “do justice to any queen.” The preacher then quoted an elderly woman who said that if her feet gave out she would crawl on her knees before riding the buses. Another preacher told the crowd about an elderly woman named Mother Pollard who refused to drop out of the boycott because of her age. She said, “My feet is tired, but my soul is rested.” Women made up much of the rank and file of the boycott.

One story was told at a mass meeting about how at one home of a wealthy white family the boss lady slipped a boycotter who worked there five dollars and warned them not to tell the boss man. Later that same day the boss man slipped the same person another five dollars and warned them not to tell the boss lady. The boycott divided the white citizens of Montgomery.

The bus company began making public statements that the boycott was 99 percent effective and they were losing money. Meanwhile, Montgomery politicians were telling reporters that the boycott was not very effective. In the first week of 1956, bus company managers told the three city commissioners that they were facing bankruptcy in the near future. Before the boycott, black people had made up three-fourths of the population that used the buses. The mayor and the White Citizens’ Council urged white people to patronize the buses, but white bus riders did not even begin to make up the loss in profits. The bus company passed an emergency bus fare increase.

## BACKLASH

Three days after the fare increase, the White Citizens' Council held a rally at the Montgomery City Auditorium. A crowd of 1,200 people gathered. Clyde Sellers, the Montgomery city commissioner in charge of police, spoke at the rally. He received a standing ovation as he walked up to the stage. He told the crowd that he would never trade his "Southern birthright for a hundred Negro votes." He made a pledge to join the White Citizens' Council that night. This brought a roar of applause. In response to this rally, the editor of the Montgomery newspaper the *Advertiser* wrote "in effect, the Montgomery police force is now an arm of the White Citizens' Council."

By now between 275 and 350 vehicles were participating in the carpool every day. There were no replacements for any car owners who wanted to drop out. This was about a month into the boycott and the MIA treasury was running low. At the fourth negotiating session, the MIA, feeling the pressure, announced that under their back-to-front and front-to-back seating proposal, black people could move voluntarily to fill seats that became empty toward the back of the bus, and white passengers would move forward to fill empty seats toward the front. Black people riding the bus would constantly have to be looking back to see if any seats opened up. This proposal would still eliminate a situation in which a black person had to stand while there were empty seats on the bus. Also, a black person would never have to give up a seat for a white person. The city commissioners rejected the offer, saying that the situation could too easily lead to disagreement over who had to move. This new proposal

would also mean that a white person would have to get up out of their seat to make room for a black person standing in the back. They claimed that the law had never required a white person to move from their seat for a black person before. The commissioners said that a whites-only section was a requirement of the segregation laws. This was a lie. Cities in Alabama, such as Mobile, operated with a back-to-front and front-to-back method and did not have a whites-only section.

On the week of January 19<sup>th</sup>, Police Commissioner Sellers said that the boycott was continuing only because white citizens were “sitting by.” He said that ninety percent of black people wanted to ride the buses, but they were intimidated by “goon squads” under the command of the black elite, which had never ridden the buses and never would. Rumors spread that King was an outsider, who had never been on a bus in Montgomery.

Many boycotters, when walking and asked by a white person what they thought of the boycott, would pretend that they were not part of it. They would say that their regular bus had “broken down” that day, or that they were walking for health reasons, or in a pinch, they would say that they “just stays off the buses and leaves that boycott alone.” It was not safe to be honest about the boycott with a white person.

On Sunday, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, the Montgomery newspaper the *Advertiser* published an article that black people had agreed to end the boycott. It said everyone would return to the buses Monday morning. The settlement terms included more courtesy from the bus drivers, special all-black buses during rush hours, and preservation of the existing seating arrangements on normal bus runs. The story said that “three prominent

Negro ministers” made the agreement with the city. King found out on Saturday night that the story was going to be published the next day. He quickly called a meeting with the MIA leadership. Before midnight, they were able to find out that the three preachers in the article were country preachers and not from Montgomery. The mayor had called them to city hall to discuss unspecified “insurance matters.” The mayor handed them a copy of the bus settlement when they got there. The MIA leaders, on Saturday, the night before the article was published, decided to wake up every black minister in Montgomery in the middle of the night. They told the ministers to denounce the *Advertiser* story as a fake the next day from their pulpits at the Sunday service and say that the boycott was still on. That Saturday night, King and a group went out to the bars and nightclubs. They would walk in, get the music to stop, and make an announcement that the boycott was still on no matter what the *Advertiser* said in the morning.

The boycott did not stop that Monday. The mayor responded by blaming the three black ministers for the collapse of the weekend agreement. Then an announcement came from city hall that the mayor and the other city commissioner were joining the White Citizens’ Council. This made all three city commissioners members. Police Commissioner Sellers then announced that he was instructing the Montgomery police to toughen up on black people standing around on the streets waiting for rides. Sellers said that people were walking into his office and volunteering to help the police. Dozens of businessmen announced that they would lay off employees who supported the boycott. The city hall switchboard was swamped with calls praising the mayor.

That same Monday, King offered his resignation to the MIA board. He said he did not believe there was a chance of a negotiated settlement with him as the leader. Nobody wanted to take his place. The board gave King a unanimous vote of confidence and persuaded him to keep his position. Then the MIA leaders considered applying for a franchise for a black-owned bus line, but assumed the city would deny their application. They talked about preparations for a federal lawsuit against segregation. Rosa Parks' appeal had been bogged down in the state courts. Their lawyer, in consultation with the New York NAACP lawyers, had already found several women willing to be plaintiffs, including Claudette Colvin and her mom.

Montgomery police began stopping carpool drivers. They would question them, check their headlights and windshield wipers, and write traffic tickets for minor or made-up violations of the law. Policemen would ticket drivers for not signaling, even when they did signal. Jo Ann Robinson received seventeen tickets in the next couple months, some for going too fast, others for going too slow.

On January 26<sup>th</sup>, King was driving and had picked up a group of passengers at one of the downtown carpool bus stops. Two motorcycle policemen pulled up behind him. When King arrived at the next pickup station, one of the motorcycle policemen pulled up next to King's window and said, "Get out, King. You're under arrest for speeding thirty miles an hour in a twenty-five-mile zone." King got into the back of a radio-summoned police cruiser. As they were driving away from downtown, he thought he was about to be killed. The police brought him to the Montgomery city jail. A few hours later, a large crowd of MIA supporters and Dexter members surrounded the jail.

The police hurriedly released him. He did not even pay his bond. That night, a total of seven mass meetings took place, one after the other in packed churches. Several of King's friends decided for him that it was too dangerous to let him drive. He began having armed bodyguards.

A few days later, King started having trouble sleeping. People began calling his house and making threats. One night his phone rang and someone said, "Listen n\*\*\*\*\*, we've taken all we want from you. Before next week you'll be sorry you ever came to Montgomery." He paced the kitchen, made a pot of coffee, and buried his face in his hands at the kitchen table. He told himself that he was afraid, had nothing left, and that people could not look to him for strength. He said a prayer ending with, "I've come to the point where I can't face it alone." At the end of the prayer, he became aware of what he called an "inner voice" that told him to do what he thought was right.

The next day, a rumor circulated that the police were going to raid the MIA office so the MIA leaders had to transfer all their records in the trunks of automobiles to another location. Two days later, the MIA leaders voted to proceed with a federal suit against bus segregation in Montgomery. The boycott became tied to the lawsuit. A local movement that initially wanted compromise under segregation now began demanding integration from the federal government. The city commissioners' lies to the press, their decision to arrest King and ticket carpool drivers, and the growth of the White Citizens' Council in Montgomery strengthened the determination of the boycotters.

At the mass meeting that night, King explained the lawsuit to a crowd of two thousand people. Someone slipped into the meeting with a message. King's house had

been bombed. When King told the crowd at the meeting, a thousand people gasped and a few shrieked. When King got home, there was a barricade of white policemen around the house. The bomb did not harm his wife Coretta Scott King and daughter Yoki, who was ten weeks old. Many black people showed up with guns and knives and little boys were carrying pop bottles broken in half ready for a fight. There was broken glass on King's front porch. In King's living room were MIA leaders, Dexter members, the mayor, Police Commissioner Sellers, police officers, the fire chief, and a few reporters. Sellers and the mayor told King that they condemned the bombing and would do everything in their power to punish the bombers. One Dexter member who was also a high school principal, yelled, "Regrets are fine, Mr. Sellers. But you created the atmosphere for this bombing with your 'get tough' policy. You've got to face that responsibility." As a high school principal, this man was dependent on the city commissioners for his job and he made the comment anyway.

People in the crowd outside said they wouldn't leave without reassurance from King that everything was all right. There were hundreds of people outside. King went outside held up his hand for silence. He told the crowd to remain nonviolent and said that even if he was stopped the movement will not stop. When King was done, Commissioner Sellers tried to speak, but the crowd booed him. Police started shouting in response and the crowd started booing louder. King requested they listen to him, and the crowd quieted. Sellers promised full police protection for King and a \$500 reward for information leading to the arrest of the bombers. When he finished, King urged everyone to go home. One policeman that



night said that if it hadn't been for King he would have been dead. At the same time, the policeman called King an "n\*\*\*\*\* preacher."

That night, both King's and Scott's fathers drove to their house and tried to convince them to leave Montgomery. King's father said, "Well, M.L. [his nickname for his son], you just come on back to Atlanta." King said that there were important principles at stake in Montgomery. His father cut him off and said, "It's better to be a live dog than a dead lion." King said to his dad that this was bigger than bus seats now. They argued for hours. Both Scott and King refused to leave Montgomery. Their fathers left their home. King later that night thanked Scott for being such a soldier. After this day, volunteers guarded King's house, even when he was out of town. They strung floodlights around his roof to illuminate the perimeter.

## DEMANDING INTEGRATION

The next day, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1956, movement lawyers filed the lawsuit in federal court against bus segregation. Both the bombing of King's house and the filing of the lawsuit made the front pages of newspapers across the country. That night, a bomb exploded in E.D. Nixon's yard, and it drew another angry crowd. Three days later, one of the women who had been listed as a plaintiff in the lawsuit withdrew her name from the suit. She told the *Advertiser* that she "was surprised" to see herself listed as a plaintiff and she said, "You know I don't want nothing to do with that mess." She worked as a maid for one of the mayor's relatives. She began receiving police protection outside of her house. Weeks later she confided in someone

and said, "I had to do what I did or I wouldn't be alive today."

Three days later, white students rioted at the University of Alabama in opposition to a court-ordered admission of the school's first black student. Her name was Autherine Lucy. For reasons of her own safety, the University trustees suspended her. The NAACP had been suing for three years to get her into the school. A federal judge revoked her suspension and then the trustees expelled her permanently before she had enrolled. A few days later, ten thousand people attended a rally at the Montgomery Coliseum held by the White Citizens' Councils of Alabama and Mississippi. All three Montgomery city commissioners were featured on stage. A Mississippi senator from the U.S. Congress spoke and said, "I am sure you are not going to permit the NAACP to control your state." He advised people to "organize and be militant." It was called the largest segregation rally of the century. A few days later, a Montgomery judge created a special grand jury to investigate racial unrest in the city. Local prosecutors summoned more than two hundred black people to testify about who was leading the boycott. They were preparing criminal indictments against MIA leaders under a 1921 law that prohibited boycotts that did not have "just cause or legal excuse." The police arrested Fred Gray, the MIA lawyer, for barratry, the practice of exciting groundless judicial proceedings.

The MIA received notice from the city commissioners and a group of white businessmen that there would be retaliation against the boycotters if they did not accept the terms of the negotiations. That night, four thousand people showed up to the mass meeting. Everyone voted to continue the boycott, except for two people.

When King was out of town in Nashville, he got a call from his friend, preacher Ralph Abernathy, who informed him that the grand jury had returned the most indictments in the history of the county. Sheriffs, prosecutors, and reporters had been hanging around the courthouse and were saying that the police would begin making arrests the next day. King caught a flight back and stopped in Atlanta because his mother had been sick in bed for three weeks. When King arrived in Atlanta, his dad told him he should not go back to Montgomery at all. The *Advertiser* reported that 115 black people were being indicted and the police were beginning a massive roundup. Montgomery detectives even came out to Atlanta in an attempt to arrest King.

King's father had invited to his home many people in Atlanta who King had looked up to throughout his life. Dr. Benjamin Mays, who was a professor, minister, and the president of Morehouse College, was there. Mays had mentored King when he was a student at Morehouse. King's father also invited the president of Atlanta University, the local bishop of the A.M.E. church, the editor of the *Atlanta Daily World* and a half-dozen other influential people. They were all there to convince King not to go back to Montgomery. His father made a speech about how King should at least stay in Atlanta until things cooled down. Everyone present said they agreed. King was not surprised at his father's determination. He thought to himself how anyone who disagreed with his dad would not have been invited. One by one, these men made speeches in support of King's father's request. Finally, King interrupted the speakers and said, "I must go back to Montgomery." His friends were being arrested and hauled off to jail at that very moment. King's father burst into

tears. Dr. Mays said King had a point and that it might be better for them to use their influence to defend him in Alabama. One of the lawyers in the room ran off, made a phone call, and announced that the entire weight of the NAACP Legal Defense Fund would be behind King's defense. King's dad, in a change of heart, announced that he would go with him to Montgomery.

Back in Montgomery, E.D. Nixon was the first one to be arrested, when he walked into the county courthouse and turned himself in. He was quickly booked, fingerprinted, photographed, and released on bond. More people that were indicted came to the courthouse and turned themselves in. A crowd of hundreds grew outside of the courthouse. Those that were arrested and released on bond received applause upon leaving the building. Bond was set at \$300. Ralph Abernathy was arrested by police and waved at people and hugged them as he was brought into the jail. The next day King arrived in Montgomery and went to the county courthouse. He was the twenty-fourth minister to be booked.

The mass meeting that night began filling up in the afternoon, hours before it was supposed to start. When the meeting began, the ninety people who had been arrested stood up on the church podium. They received a standing ovation. The leaders called a day of prayer and pilgrimage for tomorrow, with no carpool, no taxis, and no private cars. Everyone would walk. Thirty-five reporters from all around the country were at the meeting.

Bayard Rustin, a black gay man from the North and a former member of the Communist Party, had been in Montgomery for several weeks. A reporter found out who he was and threatened to expose him if he did not leave town. Rustin got word that the police might arrest him for

fraud or for inciting a riot. The most Rustin had done was counsel King on Gandhi and the use of nonviolence. The MIA leadership believed that having an openly gay man as an advisor to the movement would discredit the boycott. Rustin was hidden in the trunk of a car and snuck out of Montgomery.

Within a week of King's second arrest, the Eisenhower administration was paying close attention to the boycott. In a meeting with Eisenhower's cabinet, including his chief of staff and the Attorney General, the FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover presented a classified briefing about race on March 9<sup>th</sup>, 1956. The latest FBI intelligence reports revealed that Communist influence among black people was pervasive. The FBI did not believe that the established black leaders were sophisticated enough to control "planted insurrectionists." Hoover came with aides, easels, and display charts. He said that the mayor of Chicago Richard Daley had come close to publicly criticizing President Eisenhower for not taking stronger action in the Emmett Till lynching case. Hoover said, "I hasten to say that Mayor Daley is not a Communist, but pressures engineered by the Communists were brought to bear upon him." Hoover confirmed that much of the racist violence against black people was happening, particularly in Mississippi. He described the White Citizens' Councils as new organizations that "either could control the rising tension or become the medium through which tensions might manifest themselves." He expressed no sympathy for civil rights. One of the FBI charts showed that the number of lynchings had dropped from twenty per year to less than three per year since the FBI had begun informal investigations in 1939.

The Attorney General then suggested proposing legislation to Congress to create a Civil Rights Commission to gather facts about voting rights violations and economic discrimination against black people. The bill he suggested would also create a Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department and strengthen the Attorney General's legal power to enforce voting rights in the federal courts. After his speech, two cabinet members spoke up in opposition to his plan. One of them said doing anything more than creating a fact-finding commission would be bad because they did not want to give people expectations for results. The other cabinet member said that they should wait until there was a Republican Congress to have a better chance at passing the legislation. Eisenhower's administration was Republican. At this point it was unclear to the movement whether either party was supportive of civil rights. Nearly all the racist Southern politicians were members of the Democratic Party at this time.

Eisenhower said that what was needed was at this point was "calmness and sanity." He said, "The great mass of decent people should and will listen to *these* voices, rather than to the extremists." He was calling both the leadership of the bus boycott and the violent racists in the South "extremists." Eisenhower said to the Attorney General, "Don't take the attitude that you are another Sumner." This was a reference to Charles Sumner, a senator from Massachusetts that advanced the cause for civil rights for black people in Congress during Reconstruction. The Civil War and Reconstruction were a revolution in the United States in the 19th century. Eisenhower's reference to the last revolution in American history when discussing proposing new civil rights

legislation proves the power of the Montgomery bus boycott. In Eisenhower's mind, the boycott stirred up the threat of revolution in the United States and he was warning the Attorney General not to let the situation get out of hand.

An election was approaching that year in November. A group of nearly one hundred U.S. Congressmen released the "Southern Manifesto." The document accused the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* of a "clear abuse of judicial power." It equated integration with subversion of the Constitution and pledged the entire South to fierce resistance. Nearly all southern Democratic senators signed it. The Eisenhower administration hoped this would push black voters towards the Republican Party in the upcoming election. The racism of the Democratic Party gave them confidence that they would win swing states in the North through black votes. For this reason, most of Eisenhower's cabinet was in favor of limiting their actions to the creation of a Civil Rights Commission and nothing further.

The editor of the *Advertiser* wrote that the mass indictments were "the dumbest act that has ever been done in Montgomery." The mass indictment drew over one hundred reporters of the international press to Montgomery and the MIA received donations from people from around the world. By the time the boycott case went to trial in Montgomery, there were journalists from Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, Germany, Australia, India, Britain, France and other countries present.

Local prosecutors announced that they intended to hold eighty-nine of the indictments in abeyance, a state of inactivity. They prosecuted King alone as a test case. The trial opened on March 19<sup>th</sup>. A group of MIA witnesses

testified that King was not a leader of the boycott. A group of black women also testified about the cruelties they had seen and endured on the buses. The judge pronounced King guilty, and he had to pay a fine of \$500 or serve a year at hard labor. The trial brought in many donations and the MIA suddenly became wealthier than the NAACP. King became a national symbol. After the trial he spoke at a church in New York and ten thousand people attended. King was invited to address the NAACP's annual convention in San Francisco that year.

The NAACP agreed to pay all costs for attorneys to represent King and any other of the mass-indictment defendants brought to trial. They also agreed to represent Rosa Parks in her ongoing case and the MIA in its federal suit against bus segregation. On June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1956, the Alabama attorney general obtained a court order which banned most NAACP activities within the entire state of Alabama, including fund-raising, dues collection, and the solicitation of new members. The judge claimed that the NAACP was "organizing, supporting, and financing an illegal boycott by Negro residents of Montgomery." The NAACP resisted an order to surrender its membership lists and contribution lists to the judge. In response, the judge imposed a \$100,000 contempt fine on the organization. It took the NAACP eight years and several trips to the Supreme Court to void these sanctions.

## VICTORY OF THE BOYCOTT

On June 4<sup>th</sup>, a panel of three federal district court judges struck down Montgomery's bus segregation ordinances as unconstitutional. The vote was 2–1 by three white Southern judges. Attorneys for Montgomery and for



the state of Alabama immediately appealed the decision to the U.S. Supreme Court. The segregation laws remained in effect pending the ruling of the Supreme Court. Thousands of hallelujahs were raised at mass meetings in Montgomery. The boycott had been going on for six months. At this time, the MIA had a treasury of more than \$120,000 stored away in banks outside Alabama and safe from the legal raids of Alabama's attorney general. The MIA bought more than a dozen new station wagons, which put at ease some of the volunteered vehicles.

On August 25<sup>th</sup>, someone exploded a few sticks of dynamite in the front yard of a white reverend named Robert Graetz in Montgomery who had supported the boycott and attended meetings. The dynamite shattered the windows in nearby homes. When the reverend returned home the police had confiscated personal records and correspondence as part of the bombing investigation. They interrogated the reverend. Two days later, King wrote a letter to the White House, telling Eisenhower that black people in Montgomery were living "without protection of law." He received a response from a cabinet secretary that "the situation in Montgomery has been followed with interest" by the President.

In November, Eisenhower won the presidential elections in a landslide. In Montgomery, city officials petitioned a state court for an injunction banning the MIA carpool as an unlicensed municipal transportation system. This meant that boycott leaders would face jail on contempt charges. The injunction threatened to get rid of the MIA-owned station wagons, the entire support budget, and the organized driver system.

On November 13<sup>th</sup>, King and the MIA were in court with the city lawyers before a judge who was

considering whether to ban the carpool by injunction. During a recess, a reporter slipped to the front of the room and handed King a note of the most recent report from the press: “The United States Supreme Court today affirmed a decision of a special three-judge panel in declaring Alabama’s state and local laws requiring segregation on buses unconstitutional. The Supreme Court acted without listening to any argument; it simply said, ‘the motion to affirm is granted and the Judgment is affirmed.’” The news went around the courtroom in whispers, until one person stood up and declared, “God Almighty has spoken from Washington, D.C.!” The judge banged his gavel many times to restore order and handed down his injunction against the carpool. King received a huge standing ovation at the mass meeting that night.

Legal technicalities delayed the implementation of the Supreme Court decision. In the meantime, segregation remained the law and the MIA could provide no alternative transportation system because of the injunction. People continued to walk and share rides with friends. The MIA leaders believed that it would be only three or four more days until the Supreme Court’s orders reached Montgomery, but it ended up lasting five more weeks.

On December 20<sup>th</sup>, Supreme Court notifications arrived at the federal courthouse in Montgomery, and deputy U.S. marshals served notices on city officials. The next morning, King and an integrated group of people boarded a city bus. The bus driver said to him, “We are glad to have you.”

In the early morning on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, a racist fired a shotgun blast into King’s home. Nobody was hurt. King’s dad came to his home in Montgomery and prayed that he would be done with politics. They started arguing

and King started crying. The next day, a car pulled up to a Montgomery bus stop where a fifteen-year-old black girl was standing alone. Five men jumped out, beat her, and quickly fled.

That same day, preacher Fred Shuttlesworth, in Birmingham, Alabama announced that he would lead a group onto the front of the buses the day after Christmas. The next night he was sitting in his house when fifteen pieces of dynamite exploded beneath him. The house was destroyed, and he survived. The next day, Shuttlesworth led two hundred people into the white sections of Birmingham buses. More than twenty people were arrested and convicted on charges of violating the segregation laws.

In Montgomery, shotgun snipers fired on an integrated bus. The city responded by announcing they would have to suspend bus service if shootings continued. Two days later, another bus was fired on. A black woman who was pregnant wounded up in the hospital with bullet wounds in both legs. The city commissioners halted night bus service. In Atlanta, in January 1957, after a bus demonstration, Georgia's governor put the state militia on standby alert.

On January 10<sup>th</sup>, Ralph Abernathy's home was bombed in Montgomery. His wife and baby were home, but he was not. They were safe. The porch and front room of the house were practically demolished. Reverend Graetz's home was also bombed. That same night, four churches were bombed.

The backlash against the victory of the Montgomery bus boycott proved the need for a broader social movement capable of transforming society. Therefore, in January of 1957, King called the first Negro

Leaders Conference on Nonviolent Integration in Atlanta. Sixty preachers from ten Southern states attended. At this conference, the preachers voted to form what would eventually be called the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King was elected president of the organization.

In the organization's name, King sent telegrams to the Eisenhower administration requesting that the President speak in the South against segregationist violence. The Attorney General's aid replied that it was not possible for the President to speak in the South. They said that the Justice Department would investigate the bombings and other incidents but that the primary authority for the maintenance of law and order was in the state-level governments.

A few weeks later, King was at his house and his friend was on night duty. He had been receiving hate calls, including that night. Something disturbed him and he said to his friend, "I think we better leave here tonight." They left. A few hours later, before dawn, a bomb exploded on the corner of the block near the house. The blast crushed the front part of the house, damaged a taxi stand, and shattered the windows of three taxis parked there. The taxi drivers were sent to the hospital because they had cuts. Someone went by the area to check out what happened. They found twelve sticks of dynamite lying on the front porch that had not exploded. The fuses were giving off a bitter smell. Within an hour, the police put up a police line enclosing the area. A crowd gathered around the house. A munitions expert defused the bomb. King arrived and quieted the crowd with a speech.

A few days later, Montgomery police charged seven white men with the crime of the taxi-stand bombing

and most of the prior bombings. A jury acquitted the first two defendants despite their signed confessions. Montgomery prosecutors then dropped the charges against the remaining white bombing defendants. At the same time, the prosecutors dismissed the cases of the eighty-nine remaining defendants who had been indicted the year before on leading an “illegal boycott.”

## CONCLUSION

The Montgomery bus boycott began after three black women were arrested over a period of ten months for refusing to give up their seat to a white person. At the height of the boycott, over ten thousand people walked to their destinations and twenty thousand people received rides from hundreds of cars every day. The decisions of Montgomery’s ruling class to crack down on the boycott with police repression and by encouraging segregationist violence were political mistakes. The mayor attempted to spread obvious lies to call off the boycott. The police decided to ticket car poolers and harass groups waiting around for rides. The racists made threats against King’s life. They bombed his home, the homes of other reverends, and black churches. The White Citizens’ Council held rallies of thousands of people in Montgomery. Police arrested over a hundred people on the charge that they were leading an “illegal boycott.”

All these actions strengthened the determination of the boycotters. They exposed Montgomery’s ruling class in the eyes of the boycotters as irrationally clinging to segregation even when it was no longer possible to preserve segregation and maintain order. The bus company almost went bankrupt. The buses were nearly completely

shut down in Montgomery. The police commissioner turned a blind eye to the bombings. The Montgomery bus boycott also pushed the Eisenhower administration to consider proposing civil rights legislation to Congress, which had not been done since Reconstruction. The boycott successfully integrated the buses in Montgomery and won a federal court order requiring integration in buses throughout Alabama. The Montgomery bus boycott broke through the fear of the racist violence in the South and paved the way for the future mass struggles for integration.

## 7

**Birmingham and Selma**

Young people were the heart and soul of the civil rights movement. The famous Birmingham campaign was the final nail in the coffin of legal segregation. After this moment, the balance of power in America shifted decisively. In the middle of the Birmingham campaign, by May of 1963, the activism reached a stalemate. Hundreds of people were arrested. However, segregation was still alive and well in Birmingham. At this moment, Dr. King and the SCLC decided to reach out to young people to keep the movement going. On May 2<sup>nd</sup>, they distributed thousands of leaflets at the elementary, middle, and high schools, asking them to ditch school and join the marches.

In response to the leaflets, high school students jumped the fence to get downtown. In the next few days, thousands of young people participated in peaceful protests. Hundreds of young people were arrested each day. The number of protesters arrested grew to over a thousand. The Birmingham jail could not hold everyone. The police began putting young people in the animal pens at the state fairgrounds. This was outdoors, where there was no protection from the rain. Meanwhile, the major newspapers began reporting images of young people being attacked by dogs and fire hoses. The violence necessary to maintain segregation brought international attention. By May 7<sup>th</sup>, over 2,500 people had gone to jail. Thousands

more were still in the streets. The federal government ordered the white business leaders of Birmingham to agree to the protesters' demands.

The next day, Dr. King announced to the press an agreement to desegregate public facilities in Birmingham. The young people of Birmingham were the decisive factor in determining the success of the most important civil rights campaign of this nation in the twentieth century.

By 1963, after the Montgomery bus boycott, lunch counter sit-ins, and freedom rides across the South, the nation was torn apart. That year, the governor of Alabama said in his inaugural address "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever." These words would be proved completely false with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which outlawed segregation.

In the summer following the Birmingham campaign, over a thousand cities in America were shaken with street demonstrations for civil rights. Over twenty thousand nonviolent protesters went to jail. President Kennedy's Cabinet acknowledged that they were looking at a situation where they could be facing twelve to fourteen Birmingham's at the same time. The March on Washington, which originally planned to involve civil disobedience tactics, gave the final push to Congress to pass the Civil Rights Act, which was signed into law the next year.

After the signing ceremony for the Civil Rights Act, President Johnson met with Dr. King and other black leaders. President Johnson told them that black people and white people now had the same rights under the law. He said that demonstrations were "unnecessary" and "even self-defeating." Johnson was four months away from



elections. He was afraid that being associated with the civil rights movement would cost him the election. Months later, after Johnson's re-election, the SCLC began preparing for protests in Selma for voting rights. In the county where Selma was located, over half of the population was black, but less than one percent of those eligible were registered to vote.

Again, in December of 1964, Dr. King met with President Johnson. Dr. King told Johnson that the federal government needed to pass laws protecting voting rights. Johnson said that they were going to pass voting rights laws "eventually," but that they could not get "a voting rights bill through in this session of Congress." Johnson said that 1965 was not the year for voting rights laws. Months later, protests began in Selma. After one march, state troopers shot a black man named Jimmie Lee Jackson in the stomach twice while he was in front of his family. They proceeded to beat him. He died a week later.

Hundreds of people marched to protest the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson and voting rights discrimination. They planned to march fifty-four miles to Montgomery, the capital of Alabama. On the first day of the march, state and local police chased protesters. They beat the protesters with billy clubs and tear-gassed them. That night, news programs flooded the country with footage of the violence. Dr. King arrived at Selma. People planned to march the next day. The SCLC faced a federal court order barring the march. The SCLC did not want to violate the court order. They informed the Johnson administration that they were postponing the march. At midnight, Dr. King spoke at a mass meeting to hundreds of people packed in a church. Whether the SCLC supported it or not, people were going to march the next day, especially the young people.

Struggling with his conscience, Dr. King arrived at his friends' home in the early hours of the morning where he was staying. Due to the overwhelming support at the mass meeting that night, Dr. King told the movement lawyers that he changed his mind and was endorsing the march. Not long after King got home, the Assistant Attorney General, who was in town, arrived at the home where Dr. King was staying. Sitting at the kitchen table, he put Dr. King on the phone with the Attorney General. The conversation kept going back and forth. The Attorney General repeatedly said, "Dr. King, you promised you would not."

No one expected what happened next. Dr. King channeled the spirit of Malcolm X. He said, "But Mr. Attorney General, you have not been a black man in America for three hundred years." This ended the conversation. The next day 2,500 people began the march to Montgomery. Troopers turned back the marchers by blocking the highway. A week later, the marchers continued again and in larger numbers. By the time they arrived at Montgomery, 25,000 people had joined the march. They crowded the state capitol. President Johnson had months earlier told Dr. King that 1965 was not the year for voting rights legislation. President Johnson then went on national television during the Selma campaign and told the nation, "We shall overcome." The next month, President Johnson presented before Congress a bill for voting rights legislation. In August, he signed the bill into law.

## 8

**Bayard Rustin**

“The New ‘N\*\*\*\*\*s’ Are Gays.” This was the title of a speech made by Bayard Rustin, a black gay civil rights activist. Rustin was a close advisor to Dr. King. He was the behind-the-scenes organizer of the March on Washington. He had five decades of experience in social movements. In the 1980s, towards the end of his life, Rustin spoke these brave words at the college chapter of a gay rights group. He opened his speech saying, “Today, blacks are no longer the litmus paper or the barometer of social change. Blacks are in every segment of society and there are laws that help to protect them from racial discrimination. The new ‘n\*\*\*\*\*s’ are gays.”

Let’s take a moment and define a few terms. Litmus paper is a type of filter paper that measures whether a liquid is acidic or basic. Blue litmus paper turns red if the liquid is acidic. Red litmus paper turns blue if the liquid is basic. Additionally, a barometer is a scientific instrument that measures atmospheric pressure. It is used to predict the weather, anything from “very dry” to “stormy.” In this example, the acidity of the liquid and the storminess of the weather are metaphors for injustice.

Rustin would not be surprised by the experiences of LGBT youth today. He faced his fair share of abuse. He came out to his grandmother as gay when he was fourteen.

This was during the 1920s. A few years later, when he went to college, he was expelled from school for being gay. He then moved to Harlem and joined the Communist Party. For three years, he did anti-racist work. During World War II, Rustin refused to comply with the draft. He served three years in federal prison. In 1953, Rustin gave a speech on nonviolence in California. Two men invited him to a party and Rustin ended up having oral sex with them later that night in a car. Police caught them and threw them in jail, where they stayed for sixty days.

When the Montgomery bus boycott began gaining steam, Rustin came to Montgomery to help organize. It was not long before a reporter threatened to expose him as a gay man and an ex- Communist. Under the orders of the leadership of the boycott, Rustin left town secretly in the trunk of a car. Rustin later became a board member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). This organization played the largest role in the March on Washington and the successful Birmingham and Selma campaigns. In 1960, before these major victories, the SCLC decided to march for civil rights at the Democratic National Convention. A Democrat who was a representative from the U.S. Congress threatened to announce to the press that Dr. King and Rustin were having a gay affair unless they called off the march. Instead of cancelling the march, Rustin resigned from the SCLC's board.

In 1963, when civil rights organizations began planning the March on Washington, Rustin became the main behind-the-scenes organizer. He arrived to Washington early and set up a headquarters tent. He helped organize buses, trains, police security, and volunteer marshals for the march. He took up tasks such as

coordinating portable toilets, drinking fountains, first-aid stations, and bagged lunches. He directed hundreds of volunteers and helped make decisions over larger political issues of the march, such as the content of speeches and demands on the federal government. Rustin was the backbone of the civil rights movement, but he received little credit because he was gay.

There was not a corner that Rustin could turn during the civil rights era where he did not face criticisms and threats for his past. There was nobody with better experience to argue for the dynamism of the gay rights issue as it relates to social protest. He knew that the a movement can be successful if an oppressed group starts with the basic questions of the “fight for the right to live in dignity,” “to be oneself in every respect, and the right to be protected under law.”

Rustin knew that past social movements offered models of success. He stuck to movements with the determination of a scientist, focused on developing theories of social change, and continuing to test the validity of his theories. He never stopped organizing, and it is no coincidence that his most brilliant speeches came at the end of his life. Rustin was a pioneer who breathed fresh air into the ideology of Marxism.

## 9

**Before Stonewall**

*“Burst down those closet doors once and for all, and stand up and start to fight.”*

- Harvey Milk

The persecution of gay people was significantly worse in America under previous generations. The police harassed gay people on the streets and arrested them. People were not proud of being gay. However, the struggles of the 1960s produced a transformation in the minds of the oppressed in America. After the historic civil rights campaign in Birmingham, Dr. King said, “The Negro has a new sense of dignity and a new sense of self-respect.” In 1969, the gay poet Allen Ginsburg similarly described the participants in the Stonewall rebellion, “The guys there were so beautiful – they’ve lost that wounded look that fags all had ten years ago.” This was one of the first statements that described the transformation that Stonewall produced in the minds of gay people. Before Stonewall, gay bars were illegal in the United States. Afterwards, they became legal. Stonewall also created the international tradition of annual Gay Pride Parades. The Stonewall rebellion burst down the closet doors and changed history.

## THE EARLY GAY RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The French Revolution legalized being gay in France with the Napoleonic Code of 1810. In England, gay acts were punishable by death until 1861. In 1871, the newly formed German monarchy made being gay a crime. Gay acts among men were illegal, but gay acts among women were legal. All forms of media about being gay, such as literature, were banned. In Germany, in the early twentieth century, public debates or events about gay rights often drew large crowds. In 1897, the world's first gay rights organization, called the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, was founded in Berlin, Germany. By 1908, they had thousands of members. The group did scientific research on being gay.

In 1910, the founder of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, Magnus Hirschfeld, a gay Jewish doctor, came up with the term "transvestite," which means someone who wears clothing that is not usual for their gender. The term comes from the word "vestments" which means clothing. Hirschfeld was brought to court for conducting a survey on "homosexuality." He gave questionnaires about being gay to thousands of men for his research. He made this speech in court:

I would feel that I had brought down blame upon myself were I, who possess the knowledge that I have accumulated in the field of homosexuality, not to do everything in my power to destroy an erroneous idea, the consequences of which human language is not rich enough to describe. At the beginning of this very

week, a well-known homosexual student at the School of Technology poisoned himself because of his homosexuality. In my medical practice, I have at present a student in the same school who shot himself in the heart. Just a few weeks ago, in this very [court] room, I attended a case against two blackmailers who had driven a homosexual gentleman – one of the most honorable men whom I knew – to suicide – something a second individual, pursued by the same blackmailers, could only with difficulty be dissuaded from doing. I could present hundreds of cases like this, and others similar to it. I felt it was necessary to bring about this inquiry in order to free humanity of a blemish that it will someday think back on with the deepest sense of shame. *Per scientiam ad justitiam* [through science to justice].

The 1917 revolution in Russia legalized being gay. It took laws off the books that prevented gay people from getting married. A few years later, the Director of the Moscow Institute of Social Hygiene wrote a pamphlet entitled “The Sexual Revolution in Russia.” This pamphlet stated, “The present sexual legislation in the Soviet Union is the work of the October Revolution [of 1917].”

One of the most important consequences of the 1917 revolution in Russia and the massive social upheavals of this era was the effect that it had on the climate towards gay rights in Germany. The revolution in 1918 in Germany that overthrew the monarchy removed



the censorship of gay media and created greater freedom of the press and speech. Immediately after the 1918 revolution in Germany, the Institute for Sexual Science was established in Berlin. This could not have been done before the revolution. The Institute for Sexual Science had a library, did research, gave free medical advice, and had lectures open to the public. These helpful forms of therapy were previously unavailable anywhere in the world. There was an increase in gay publications in Germany after the 1918 revolution. In 1921, a gay theater with original gay plays formed in Berlin.

The Institute for Sexual Science and the gay rights movement in Germany became a progressive symbol around the world. In 1921, the World League for Sexual Reform formed, an international coalition dedicated to gay rights. They held international congresses around Europe for the next decade. Hirschfeld spoke around the world about his efforts and received packed halls wherever he went. There were instances of hate crimes in response to gay rights activism. In 1921, anti-Semites attacked Hirschfeld in Munich, fractured his skull, and left him on the street. In 1923, in Vienna, Nazi youth opened fire at a lecture and wounded a large number of members of the audience. At its peak, 130,000 people were associated with the World League for Sexual Reform.

In the early 1930s, the backlash began against the significant gains of the early gay rights movement. In the Soviet Union, Joseph Stalin reintroduced the law that criminalized gay people in 1933. Then the Soviet government carried out mass arrests of gay people. Around this time, a similar backlash against gay rights occurred in Germany. Adolf Hitler described Hirschfeld as “the most dangerous Jew in Germany.”

In May of 1933, forty thousand Nazi supporters participated in a rally to burn books that were considered “un-German.” Ten thousand of the books burned belonged to the library of the Institute for Sexual Science. The Nazis burned a bust of Hirschfeld, who fled the country. The leading liberal political party in Germany at the time, the German Social Democratic Party, made accusations and jokes about Nazi Party members of being gay in their newspapers. In 1934, open Nazi terror against gay people began with the murder of gay members of the military forces of the Nazi Party. The German Communist Party organized a faction within their party called the German Association for Proletarian Sexual Politics in 1930 to support a removal of the law against being gay. It attained a membership of 20,000 people. In two years, the German Communist Party shut down this faction, expelled its leader, and banned the sale of gay rights literature within its organization. In 1935, the Nazis made it illegal for gay people to hug, kiss, or have gay fantasies. Tens of thousands of gay people were sent to concentration camps along with Jews and political dissidents. About one-third of the gay people sent to Nazi prison camps survived.

## THE UNITED STATES BEFORE STONEWALL

Germany in the 1920s was a more progressive place for gay rights than the United States was before Stonewall. In 1945, the United States occupied part of West Germany following World War II. During the occupation of West Germany, the United States made the decision to keep many gay people who had survived the Holocaust in prison. They remained there until the late 1960s.

In the United States, gay acts were illegal in every state except Illinois until 1969. In the 1950s, President Harry Truman made “sexual perversion” criteria for being fired from a government job. The FBI collected information on gay bars and conducted interrogations to get the names of gay people, using lie detector tests. They searched mail for gay material. Police shut down private gay parties. Cross-dressing was illegal in New York and many other states. If you were gay, you could be arrested at a bar, a cruising area where gay people met up, a public bathroom, a beach, or even in your own home.

Once arrested, your name, address, and place of employment could be published in a newspaper. Newspapers would make announcements when police were cracking down on “deviates.” Plainclothes police would hit on gay people in bars and then arrest them if they showed interest. If someone was at a gay bar that did not look culturally gay, it was a good idea to stay away from them because they were likely a cop. Police officers often chased gay people out of cruising areas. In 1953, New Orleans police put 64 women in jail for being at a gay bar in one night. In 1961, San Francisco police arrested 89 men and 14 women at a gay bar in a night. In 1955, Baltimore police raided a gay bar and put 162 men in jail in a single night.

During a raid of a gay bar, police would sometimes bring dogs. They would strip search people to find out who was cross-dressing. Lesbians reported being sexually molested by police officers during raids. In 1964 in New York, police raided a bar and arrested 43 women in one night. While being searched by a policewoman, the women were all made to pull down their pants and bend over. One

woman panicked while she was in a police van on her way to jail and ate her driver's license.

Anti-gay bigots would go to cruising areas. They would beat, rob, or murder gay people. If two people met in a cruising area and went back to one person's house, that person could be robbed. They would not be allowed to report the crime because it was against the law to be gay. Gay people were often blackmailed. Gangs of men would hang outside of lesbian bars, hit on women, and then attack the women if they rejected them.

Adults warned young people about being gay. A police detective that was part of the Morals Squad lectured a packed school assembly. He said, "There may be some in this auditorium. There may be some here today that will be homosexual in the future. There are a lot of kids here. There may be some girls here who will turn lesbian. We don't know. But it's serious, don't kid yourselves about it. They can be anywhere. They could be judges, lawyers. We ought to know, we've arrested all of them. So if any one of you, have let yourself become involved with an adult homosexual, or with another boy, and you're doing this on a regular basis, you better stop quick. Because one out of three of you will turn queer. And if we catch you, involved with a homosexual, your parents are going to know about it first. And you will be caught, don't think you won't be caught, because this is one thing you cannot get away with. This is one thing that if you don't get caught by us, you'll be caught by yourself. And the rest of your life will be a living hell."

There were very few gay rights organizations in the United States before Stonewall. The Mattachine Society was an organization whose goal was to legalize gay acts between adults. They would not allow anyone under

twenty-one years old to join. When the New York chapter decided to have public lectures, the police intervened. The cops convinced the organization's landlord to throw them out of the office that they were renting. When the Mattachine Society held pickets, they had a strict coat and tie dress code. The president of the Florida chapter of the Mattachine Society was interviewed on television. The interviewer asked him, "Are you homosexual?" He replied, "I gave it up, oh I forget, some years ago, over four years ago. It's not my cup of tea."

Many gay women and men had fake heterosexual marriages to avoid discrimination. The American Psychiatric Association considered "homosexuality" a mental disorder. If you went to a therapist and said you thought you might be gay, they would try to convince you to be heterosexual. In 1955 in Iowa, after the kidnap and murder of a boy, the county attorney had 29 local known gay people committed to asylums. Psychologists performed electric shock therapy on gay men. The gay men would be shown pictures of attractive looking men and would be shocked.

At Atascadero State Hospital in California, doctors gave gay people a drug that simulated the experience of drowning. Gay people sentenced to medical institutions sometimes faced sterilization, castration, or lobotomies, where doctors took out the prefrontal lobe of the brain. One gay man recollected, "Somebody that I knew that was older than me, his family had him sent off where they go up and damage the frontal part of the brain. The last time I saw him, he was a walking vegetable. Because he was homosexual."

## 10

### The Stonewall Rebellion

The Stonewall rebellion was the peak of the civil rights movement in the United States. They legalized gay bars. The rebellion began in the early morning hours of June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1969. By the third day, the police were asking gay people to return to the bars and stay out of the streets. Five years before Stonewall, pickets for gay rights could hardly get ten people to attend because of fears of rocks being thrown at them. A reporter describing the rebellion said the marches and celebrations looked like something out of “a *fairy tale*” from a gay fictional novel. In 1970, on the one-year anniversary of Stonewall, thousands of people marched in New York City. This founded the international tradition of gay pride parades.

The Stonewall Inn in Greenwich Village in New York was a popular gay bar. The Mafia ran the bar because selling alcohol to gay people was illegal. The Stonewall Inn did not bother to keep up with proper health code regulations. There was no running water behind the main bar so the bartenders filled up a sink and a rubber tub at the start of their shift. They would take anybody’s glass, run it through the water, refill it, and give it to someone else. This caused an outbreak of hepatitis. When the water in the rubber tub got dirty, the porter emptied the water in a toilet in the men’s room. Combining this with people using the toilets caused them to overflow. The bathroom

floors were constantly wet with dirty water. The staff of the Stonewall Inn regularly blackmailed customers with the fact that they were gay. Police often raided the bar and shut it down. After the bar paid off the cops, it would reopen a few hours later.

The night of the rebellion the Stonewall Inn was packed when the cops arrived to shut it down. There were two hundred people there. The bar had just been raided the previous Tuesday. Two undercover cops were already inside. At 1:20 A.M., eight cops came to the bar's front door. Half were in plainclothes and the other half were in uniform. The Deputy Inspector shouted, "Police! We're taking the place!"

A few seconds later, the doors opened. Once inside, the cops cut the music and turned the lights on. People stopped dancing. The cops went to the back room and started pushing people out to the front area. Anyone arrested for being gay could lose their job or be outed to their families. The cops stood guard at the doors and told everyone to get in a line and have their identification ready. Nobody was allowed out without showing their IDs.

The police forced the drag queens to stand in one area. The cops were arresting anyone cross-dressing. In this part of the raid, a policewoman would walk up to each one of them, grab their elbow tightly and say, "Okay, let's go and check you out." She wanted to take them to the bathroom to see if they were male. Generally at this point, the drag queen would say something like, "All right, honey, I'm a man." On this night, people started talking back to the cops. Some people said, "We're not taking this!" and "I'm not showing you my ID!" The drag queens refused to go to the bathroom. They screamed, "Get your hands off me!" and "Don't touch me!" The cops tried to

push the drag queens into the bathroom. The police placed a bunch of them under arrest.

A group of lesbians stood against the back wall. The cops approached them and started to frisk them by inappropriately feeling them up. The cops pushed the women around. The women talked back to the cops. The women said, "We have a right to be here," and "What are you doing?" After about ten or fifteen minutes of being lined up, club goers began to leave the place. The police slowly began letting people exit from the bar after they showed their identification and checked them out.

A crowd began to gather outside. It was a hot summer night. People complained in loud high-pitched tones. They were wondering what was taking so long. One guy was walking along the street with his partner by Christopher Park, right next to the bar. They were heading to the Stonewall and were talking about what the world was going to be like when "the revolution" happened. The guy recalled, "We all figured that the Black Panthers were going to start the revolution."

The crowd started to cheer as people exited. One young man, as he left, said flirtatiously to the detective guarding the door, "Hello there, fella!" Some people took bows when they exited. Someone talked about gay power as they left and got applause from the crowd. One person said, "Have you seen Maxine? Where *is* my wife? – I told her not to go far!"

The cops started to rush people out and handled them roughly. One cop gave someone a kick as they walked out. People gave the cops attitude as they left, saying, "don't touch me." The crowd shouted, "go get 'em!" Some people exiting threw their arms up and out into a V-shape like a runway supermodel.



Police were arresting bar employees and the drag queens that had talked back to the cops inside the bar. Everyone who was not being arrested was now outside of the bar. Patrol cars and a police van arrived. The police van parked on the curb right outside the Stonewall Inn. The crowd went quiet. Normally people left during a raid. This time people stayed. The police were not worried about the crowd because they had never encountered hostility from gay people. The police tried to order a second police van through their radiotelephone because they were arresting more people than expected. A person in the crowd had a radio on the police frequency and said, "disregard that call." This confused the police.

The cops manhandled the drag queens and bar employees as they brought them outside. One by one, the cops pushed them into the police van. The crowd was taunting the police and giving rounds of applause. Suddenly one guy screamed, "Gay Power!" His friend nudged him and said, "Shut up!" But everyone heard it. A bunch more people started shouting "Gay Power!" Some people in the crowd didn't take the slogan seriously. People giggled. The chant faded out.

As the bar employees were being loaded into the police van, some people in the crowd started to sing, "We Shall Overcome." This didn't last long. Three drag queens were next to be put into the police van. As they were being taken to the van, they waved at the crowd. Some of the young people who lived on the streets said to them as they were being taken away, "Have a good rest," and "Oh, I'm glad they're taking her. She needs a good rest," and "Oh, Lily's Law got you, girl!" The crowd cracked up at the jokes people made.

One cop shoved a drag queen being taken to the police van. She turned around and smacked the cop over the head with her purse. He hit her with his baton. The crowd screamed and booed. Someone shouted to turn the police van over. People began banging on the sides of the police van. The cops shoved people, told the crowd to move back, and tried to guard the van. The police threatened the crowd. Someone jumped out past the front line of the crowd and shouted, "Nobody's going to fuck around with me. I ain't going to take this shit." Then they jumped back into the crowd.

People rushed to payphones in the area and told their friends to come. Others ran around the neighborhood, shouting that the Stonewall was being busted. The numbers of the crowd grew. One guy shouted, "pig!" at a cop. The cop grabbed the person, waved his baton threateningly, and screamed, "Just say that again!" The guy replied, "That would be rather silly, since you have a gun and a billy club, and I don't. I don't see any point in that!" The cop shoved him back.

People threw pennies and beer cans at the police van. A rumor went around the crowd that the police were beating those people still inside the bar. They shouted for the police to let their friends out. Someone shouted, "Get the Mafia out of the bars!" A cop bringing a drag queen to the police van said to her, "I can't even believe you're a boy!" She said, "I'm not a boy! You don't understand, I'm a girl, but it's real hard for me to explain to you." He said, "Come on, let's go," and put her in the police van. She was thinking to herself, "I'm dead." She had just turned eighteen that day and was wearing her mother's sleeveless cocktail dress.

While the police were attempting to put more drag queens into the van, the girl carefully stepped down, said, "Excuse me," and squeezed her way out. As she was walking away, the cop who had put her in there shouted, "Hey you! Come over here!" She begged him, "Please! It's my birthday; I'm eighteen. And my mother's going to kill me!" She was crying and her makeup was ruined. The cop didn't move so she kept walking.

Two plainclothes cops pushed one guy in the crowd. He shoved back. A uniformed cop put his baton between the man's legs and tripped him. They dragged him to the police van. There were two cops on each side of him. The cops got the man to the back doors of the police van. While he was handcuffed, he jumped up, spread his feet out on the right and left sides of the back of the van, and sprang backwards. He knocked the cops to the ground. A few people in the crowd tried to help the guy. The cops finally dragged him into the police van. In the process, the doors of the van had been left open. Three or four people who were arrested and had been inside the van snuck out. The crowd cheered.

The cops began dragging a tough looking butch lesbian woman outside to be arrested. She was being arrested for cross-dressing. When she was inside of the bar, the cops had handcuffed her behind her back. When she was close to the exit door of the bar, a cop attempted to yank her out. She complained about her treatment. In response, the cop hit her on the head with a baton. When she was outside, three or four cops were manhandling her to a squad car. She struggled with the police all the way from the door of the Stonewall to the back door of the squad car. Twice the police shoved her to the car. Both

times, she made it all the way back to the door of the Stonewall, screaming, kicking, and cussing.

On the third attempt, a cop picked her up and threw her into the squad car. People screamed, “police brutality!” and “pigs!” They threw coins at the cops. The woman shouted to the crowd, “Why don’t you guys do something!?” The crowd rushed to the van. The cops closed the doors to their cars and the police van. Someone yelled, “let’s turn it over!” People shook the van back and forth. The lead police officer told the cops in the cars to drop the prisoners off at the precinct and hurry back. The police sirens were screaming. People slashed all four tires of the squad car with the lesbian woman. The police cars had to go slowly through the crowd to get through them. People pounded on the cars. The van and three police cars drove off.

At this point, there were ten cops left, and only one was in uniform. The cops pushed back at the crowd. There was at most ten feet of space between the cops and the crowd. People threw beer cans. The cops came at people with batons. People found a stack of bricks. They started throwing bricks. Someone picked up a cobblestone that was part of the sidewalk. They threw it on the hood of a police car. Someone shouted, “let’s get em!”

The crowd had grown much larger. One person threw something that hit a cop right below the eye. The cop started bleeding. The Deputy Inspector ran into the crowd and tackled the man who he thought threw the object. After a struggle, three cops dragged the man out of the crowd and inside the bar. The cops cuffed the man to a pipe and kicked him several times. The cops were backing up to go inside the bar. They grabbed a few protesters they wanted to arrest. They beat people with clubs. The

remaining cops outside then went inside the Stonewall Inn and closed the door. One reporter covering the event came with them inside the bar.

The cops barricaded the door and windows of the Stonewall Inn with tables and whatever they could find. The cops used their portable radio to call for backup. The person in the crowd that was listening into the police channel followed up each request for help immediately with, “disregard that call.”

People began throwing garbage, bottles, pieces of glass, and cobblestones at the Stonewall Inn. Someone threw a metal garbage can through the bar’s window. It sat there, supported by the window ledge. Gay street youth, drag queens, hustlers and middle-class gay people were all participating. One cop opened the door of the bar, stuck their gun out of the crack, and told people to stay back. Then they withdrew the gun, closed the door, and went back inside.

People began shouting “Gay Power!” and “We want freedom!” The objects being thrown made holes in the door of the bar. People stuffed paper into the cracks of the door and the windows. They lit the paper on fire with their lighters and ran away. People stayed away from the front of the Stonewall for long periods of time because they were afraid the cops would fire on the crowd. A bunch of guys dug a parking meter out of the ground and made a running start. They slammed the parking meter against the door of the Stonewall and used it repeatedly as a battering ram. The crowd cheered loudly. People cried, “We’re the pink panthers!” The door of the bar and the main window were beginning to give.

The cops stood ready with their guns. The Deputy Inspector was the lead police officer in this situation. He

also wrote the U.S. Army's manual for hand-to-hand combat in World War II and participated in the Battle of the Bulge, which was the largest and bloodiest battle fought by the United States in the Second World War. He had been a victim of a mine explosion in that battle. The Deputy Inspector later described how he felt that night, "There was never any time that I felt more scared."

Many of the people who participated in the rebellion came from families that beat them, burned them, or threw boiling water at them. Some were homeless. Some people had lived by prostituting themselves. Some people suffered mental breakdowns and attempted suicide. One teenager was given a dishonorable discharge from the Navy for being gay. He couldn't get a job afterwards, so he attempted to kill himself by cutting his wrists with razor blades. One gay homeless youth had been discharged from the army for being gay. He came home to his family and his father threw him out of the house through a glass door. One participant in the rebellion recollected, "We all had a collective feeling like we'd had enough of this kind of shit. It wasn't anything tangible anybody said to anyone else, it was just kind of like everything over the years had come to a head on that one particular night."

The crowd got the door open. Then the police shut the door. The crowd got the door open again. This happened several times. When the door was open people threw bottles, beer cans, broken glass, and other pieces of garbage inside the bar. People began throwing Molotov cocktails at the bar. The big front window of the bar had been covered with plywood. Someone squirted lighter fluid all over it and put a match to it. Every time the cops made a call for help on the radio, somebody in the crowd

followed their message up with, “disregard that call.” One officer got so frustrated he threw his revolver at the crowd.

Two policewomen who had been trapped inside the Stonewall escaped through a vent in the back of the bar, up near the roof. Outside, some protesters were crying. People were cut up from being beaten by police and being hit accidentally by objects thrown. The cops grabbed a hose and fire extinguisher to put the flames out. The cops all took their pistols out. The Deputy Inspector told them not to fire. He said, “Anybody who fires their gun without me saying ‘Fire!’ is gonna be in big, big trouble. You’ll be walking the loneliest beat on Staten Island for the rest of your career.” The crowd knocked down the plywood from one of the big windows. The policemen stuck the firehose through a crack in the door and tried to spray the crowd. A weak stream came out. On the inside, cops slipped on the water. People in the crowd taunted the police and danced around.

The crowd broke the door down. Young people dumped garbage from the trashcans outside through the cracked windows of the bar. They squirted it with lighter fluid and lit it on fire. The flame flashed and there was a lot of smoke. Someone lit a trashcan full of paper on fire and threw it through the window. People were throwing bricks inside the bar. The cops were dodging them. The building looked like it was about to go up in flames. Then the sirens blared. Two fire trucks arrived.

Two buses of riot police came. They were armed with shields, helmets with plastic visors, and tear gas. They were angry because the police, by hiding inside the bar, had been forced to retreat. That had never happened to them before. The riot police moved the crowd away from the front door of the Stonewall. The police tried to arrest

the drag queens and put them into police vans. Fights broke out between the drag queens and the police. The riot police formed a V-shaped wedge and tried to clear the street, but the crowd ran around the block and came back. This happened repeatedly. It was a tug-of-war for the streets. The streets were packed. The police went after people who were just standing there. The police tried to stop the streets from being occupied by parking police cars there. The crowd occupied the main intersection of the Stonewall to stop traffic. They overturned a car in that intersection. People set fire to trashcans and broke store windows.

Some of the gay street youth gathered in front of the police. They joined arms and did a kick line like the Rockettes. They sang, "We are the Stonewall girls! We wear our hair in curls! We wear no underwear! We show our pubic hairs!" They did this repeatedly to taunt the police. The police chased after them. The fire trucks turned their hoses on the crowd to disperse them. The street youth called the police "the girls in blue," and "Lily Law." They would get close to the police, do the kick line with the chant, be chased away, and then come back and do it over and over again. As many as twenty people would do the kick line in front of the cops. The cops beat many people, some who were taunting them, and others who were simply there. Demonstrators kept shouting, "Gay Power!" By sunrise, the crowd had fizzled out. The street was a mess with glass and trash everywhere.

The next day was Saturday. People graffitied "Gay Power" and "Legalize Gay Bars" on the boarded-up windows of the Stonewall Inn. There was a huge turnout of people. The crowd chanted, "Equality for homosexuals!" and "Christopher Street belongs to the



queens!” Gay people held hands and kissed in public. There were cheers. People struck poses for pictures. The crowd made lots of jokes. One person said, “I just want you all to know, that sometimes being homosexual is a big pain in the ass.” Just the day before, to go to a gay bar, one would have to knock on a door and speak to someone through a peephole. If they made noise, police would harass or beat them. One participant recollected, “Here’s the homosexual standing on the streets. And it was incredible.”

When the sidewalks overflowed with people, they blocked off the streets. People rocked cars and buses back and forth that came through the streets. A few people jumped on the hood of a cab. One person climbed up a lamppost and dropped something heavy that shattered the windshield of a squad car. The police dragged that person into the squad car, drove away, and beat them. One person dropped a concrete block on the hood of a police car. Then people surrounded the car, beat on it with their fists, and danced on top of it. Someone tossed a sack of wet garbage through a cop car window and right onto the cop’s face. The bag broke and soggy coffee grounds dripped down the cop’s face. There were nearly two thousand people there at this point.

The police had been unable to control the situation, so the riot police were brought in for a second night. Around 2:00 AM, one hundred and fifty riot police arrived. People threw beer cans at the riot police’s vans and cars. Six riot cops grabbed a young person to arrest him and throw him in a police van. They were beating him with nightsticks in the face, stomach, and genitals. Someone screamed in a high pitched and piercing voice, “Save our sister!” Fifty demonstrators rushed the cops and took the

boy back into the crowd. The queens formed a solid wall and refused to let the cops go back into the crowd to regain him.

Then the riot police tried to clear the streets with a V-shaped wedge formation. They were shoulder-to-shoulder, had big plastic shields that were four feet tall, and marched slowly. The crowd would disperse and then come back around. Cops chased demonstrators down the side streets. Sometimes the young people would get right in front of the riot police's V-shaped wedge formation and do the "Stonewall girls" chorus and the kick line routine. Again and again, the demonstrators would taunt the riot police with their kick line, and then run away at the last second when the police got close.

The cops beat and arrested many people. One police officer grabbed a Puerto Rican queen. The cop raised his arm to club her with his baton. The queen suddenly asked the cop, "How'd you like a big Spanish dick up your little Irish ass?" The officer was so shocked that in mid-swing he stopped his baton. The queen ran away. In another situation, two cops were chasing a crowd of a hundred or more demonstrators down a side street. One of the demonstrators suddenly realized that they outnumbered the police. The man immediately shouted that they should catch the police, rip their clothes off, and screw them on the spot. The crowd turned on the police. The police quickly reversed themselves and ran for blocks. The angry crowd was in hot pursuit, yelling, "Catch them! Fuck them!"

By 3:30 A.M., hundreds of riot police dispersed the crowds. The next day, on Sunday, the cops arrived early and in larger numbers. The crowd did not outnumber the cops on this day. The police were asking people to go back

inside the gay bars. Monday and Tuesday also remained relatively calm. The following Wednesday, a reporter who had observed the rebellion firsthand described the demonstrators in an article with the words “fag” and “dyke.” Hundreds of angry people gathered in the street that night. They threw bottles and lit fires. The cops were especially brutal on this day and they beat and arrested people.

A year later, on June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1970, a newly formed organization called the Gay Liberation Front called a march in New York. The march started at the Stonewall Inn and began with only a few hundred people. Many of the people marching were afraid of being attacked or robbed. Some of the first demonstrators that arrived there got eggs thrown at them from buildings. At first, a lot of gay people observed from the sidewalks, but more and more kept joining the march as it went on. By the time the marchers reached Central Park, thousands followed behind them. Someone walking in the middle of the march couldn’t see the beginning or the end of the march. Straight people stood in the streets with their mouths open, gawking. Marchers cried tears of joy and chanted, “Out of the closets and into the streets!”

## Ecology

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## 11

### **Environmental Justice**

What is justice to the tree? Do trees have feelings, brains, and memories? Do they have families, personalities, and bartering systems? Do some trees have ancient wisdom while others have only the naiveté of youth? What makes some trees live long and healthy lives? What prevents them from getting to adulthood?

Deer like to eat young trees. They have their species that they enjoy. When an elder tree, one who has taken up a large part of the canopy, passes away, there arises an opportunity. The ground is inundated with seeds of neighboring trees. Slowly but surely, many different species of trees grow towards the sun.

Meanwhile, the rain pours, and the fungus begins to grow their roots into the trunk of the tree. Their food is a ripe and nutritious treat. The bugs begin to find shelter under the bark and inside the trunk. Birds know where to look to find these bugs. Wolves and hyena too know that deer are often found grazing these areas.

So begins and ends the circle of life. The elder tree has lived and died. The forest begins to eat the tree that once consumed so much. One can measure the value of a tree by their age, weight, or size. Or one see their value in the life they give to an entire ecosystem. If a tree falls in the forest, the plant and animal kingdoms visit.

If there is ever such a thing as justice to the tree, it is in their ability to grow not as an individual but as a community. While an elder tree may be home to thousands of species of animals and plants, they also often are connected with their roots to many neighboring trees nearby. Through the fungal network, they may be trading partners to a system of plants ranging miles long.

An animal adapts to an ecosystem. A tree creates an ecosystem. The value in a tree never rests in their status as an individual compared to their community. One tree cannot block out the sun. A village of trees, a network, and most importantly a forest can. When a group of trees covers 97-98% of the sunlight, they create a microclimate. The transition from coniferous trees to broad-leaved trees paved the way for the entire evolution from plant to insect to amphibian to reptiles to mammals to primates.

## 12

### **Environmental Science**

I am interested in the field of environmental science because I believe that climate change, food distribution, and water systems management are important issues for the future. As a person who is enthusiastic about ecology, botany, and horticulture, I believe that having a better understanding of these fields will significantly help build a more sustainable, greener future.

Many people do not know that prairie grass has roots that extend ten feet deep and can sustain thousands of different species of plants and animals. The largest living thing is not a humpback whale or a sequoia tree, but a clonal colony of trees with a single root system in the state of Utah that occupies 144 acres. Perhaps, if we consider mycorrhiza to be alive, then a honey fungus in the state of Oregon that occupies 2300 acres might be the largest living thing.

The study of plants contains important knowledge on teaching us how to go green and live sustainably. Many people do not know that trees can live for thousands of years, provide parenting for their young, and trade with other trees and fungi for food and resources. People think of plants as without movement, but below ground they are constantly digging for nutrients and above ground they play, search for sunlight, and even rest their leaves at night.

The science of growing food is an area that is significant because the number one cause of climate change is our consumption habits. Foods that are high in nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium are important to create healthy soil. By learning more about food, we can make choices that are more local, organic, and sustainable. The vegetarian diet is not only healthier but can help improve natural ecosystems by lessening our use of water, fossil fuels, and monocrop agriculture.

As a person enthusiastic about environmental science, I am passionate about learning calculus, physics, and engineering. Changing our dependence on fossil fuels requires switching to renewables such as solar panels, windmills, hydraulics, and biomass. I am committed to environmental justice.

## ECOLOGY QUIZ

1. What is ecology?

- A. The study of the interrelationship of organisms and their environments.
- B. A branch of biology dealing with plant life.
- C. The study of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers, or ornamental plants.
- D. A branch of biology dealing with fungi.



2. What is horticulture?

- A. The study of the interrelationship of organisms and their environments.
- B. A branch of biology dealing with plant life.
- C. The study of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers, or ornamental plants.
- D. A branch of biology dealing with fungi.

3. What is botany?

- A. The study of the interrelationship of organisms and their environments.
- B. A branch of biology dealing with plant life.
- C. The study of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers, or ornamental plants.
- D. A branch of biology dealing with fungi.

4. What is mycology?

- A. The study of the interrelationship of organisms and their environments.
- B. A branch of biology dealing with plant life.
- C. The study of growing fruits, vegetables, flowers, or ornamental plants.
- D. A branch of biology dealing with fungi.

5. What is biology?

- A. The study of living organisms and vital processes.
- B. The study of the composition, structure, and properties of substances and their transformations.
- C. A science that deals with matter and energy and their interactions.

D. A science that deals with the history of the earth and life as recorded with rocks.

6. How far do prairie grass roots extend into the ground?

- A. 2 ½ feet.
- B. 5 feet.
- C. 7 ½ feet.
- D. 10+ feet.

7. How many different species can prairie grass sustain?

- A. 1-2 species.
- B. Tens of species.
- C. Hundreds of species.
- D. Thousands of species.

8. What is the largest living thing?

- A. Humpback whale.
- B. Sequoia tree.
- C. 144 acre clonal tree colony in Utah.
- D. 2386 acre honey fungus in Oregon.

9. How old is the oldest living thing?

- A. Hundreds of thousands of years.
- B. Hundreds of years.
- C. Thousands of years.
- D. Tens of thousands of years.

10. Which nutrient is NOT essential for healthy soil?

- A. Nitrogen
- B. Phosphorus
- C. Potassium
- D. Silicon

*Answers on page 177.*

## Conclusion: General Sherman

In 1862, Karl Marx, living in London and working on *Das Kapital*, and Fredrick Engels, living in Manchester and working for his family's business in textiles, exchanged letters about the Civil War in the United States. Understanding the significance of slavery both to the history of the country and the conflict, a fact that was being diminished in importance by the British press, the writers contemplated the course of the war. Two years before it happened, Engels predicted Sherman's March, a military campaign that practiced a scorched earth policy and destroyed much of the infrastructure in the South. It began in the northwest and ended by capturing the city of Savannah, Georgia near the sea. William Tecumseh Sherman, whose father named him after the chief of the Shawnees, was a general in the Civil War that negotiated the surrender of the Confederacy in North and South Carolina, Florida, and Georgia in April of 1865. In 1890, naturalists designated the Giant Forest as part of the Sequoia National Park in California. Almost reaching 7,000 ft tall and being over 2,300 years old, the sequoia tree named General Sherman is the biggest tree in the world. I visited this tree in June of 2017.

Several years ago, I was driving an Uber for two passengers on the highway for a carpool ride. For some reason, I decided to ask the riders, who did not know each other, "Do you ever feel like a spider?" They said that they



*Visiting the General Sherman tree with my mom.*

did not and asked me if I ever felt like one. I said, “No, but I was watching a documentary online the other day about spiders. I could only get through half of it because it was too much.” And I shivered. The riders laughed. That day I decided to say whatever was on my mind. “What do you guys think of Standing Rock?” The passengers, two men, were not sure. “Does it ever remind you of Birmingham?”

“No, why would it?”

“The police dogs and the fire hoses.”

Luckily, at the end of the day, one of my passengers ended up giving me a tip for the history lesson!

The Standing Rock campaign, which occurred from April 2016 to February 2017 was a historic moment in the movement to build a better environment and reduce our dependence on fossil fuels. Also known as the Dakota Access Pipeline Protests, and using the hashtag #NoDAPL, Native Americans and supporters used nonviolent methods to protest the building of an oil pipeline from North Dakota to Illinois and running under the Missouri and Mississippi rivers and Lake Oahe. By December of 2016, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, under the administration of Barack Obama rejected an application for an easement due to the movement, which had gone viral on social media, and received international attention. The oil industry and the government reacted to activists with mace, rubber bullets, tasers, and sound canons, a disproportionate response. Protests reached their highest point in October of 2016, when a herd of buffalo showed up to the site as arrests were taking place. Water protectors, taking this as a sign, cheered in glee!

How did Engels predict the end of the Civil War? Having served in the Prussian Army in his twenties, he took an interest in military matters. He also understood better than others the intractable nature of the conflict and the obstinacy of the Confederate Army. Therefore, having grasped the essential features of the position, he calculated a few steps ahead, and found the winning move for the Union. When Ulysses S. Grant assumed the presidency in 1869, Sherman took over as Commanding General of the Army and worked in that role for 14 years. What are the similarities between the person, W. T. Sherman, and the tree? Both are epic figures of the United States of America. The average sequoia acorn holds about 200 seeds. The

trees of the southern Sierra Nevada mountain range are threatened by wildfires and climate change.



**The More You Know:** An elephant eats over 300 pounds and 18 hours per day. Being a vegetarian is good for health, animal rights, and the environment. Plant proteins are more easily digested than animal proteins. Eating meat and dairy can lead to high blood pressure, heart disease, and cancer.

Human survival is dependent on improving sustainability practices for planet earth. One of the most important aspects of this is making a commitment to recycling. Mushrooms are masters of recycling in the forests. Decaying plant and animal matter are digested by fungus. Then the fungi, using a network of connections to trees through the root system, trade their food for sugar. Trees have an interest in producing fruit and leaves that are edible by the animals of the forest. When the animals eat, grow, and die, those nutrients are returned to the forest floor, and mushrooms help digest the material. The fruiting bodies are only visible part of the time, often after a rainfall, but most of the fungal root system is thin and stringy, running miles long and connecting a network of trees. Trees can give other trees, often of their own species, resources through the fungal network.

Humans need to make an adjustment to be more in harmony with the planet. Overpopulation and overconsumption of resources makes our behavior more like a virus than like a mutual, symbiotic relationship.

Ginkgo trees were the first species of trees to develop broad leaves. This was a significant moment in evolutionary history because it fueled bugs evolving into amphibians to reptiles to mammals. Humans are mammals that are primates and specifically apes. Therefore, plants are our mothers. They have given us food, as a loan, which they hope to get back in the circle of life.

If I were a tree, I'd like to be a sequoia. If I were a seed, I'd like to be buried next to the General Sherman tree. While a tree will distribute five million seeds in its lifetime, only one will grow up to be the parent tree's size. The chances are that low. Competition on the forest floor for sunlight makes it difficult to grow. When an elder tree dies, even the trees next to it are not ready for the new level of sunlight that they will receive. It takes them a few years to adjust their leaves, which are too sensitive in the immediate aftermath of the opening up of the canopy. Who wouldn't want to be a tall, strong tree, breathing in the forest air and restoring the uppermost foliage?

Thousands of years ago, before humans populated the United States in a manner that led to bison being put on the endangered species list, the buffalo lived from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico and from California to Virginia. English colonizers first saw buffalo near the Potomac River on the east coast near Maryland. This leads one to believe that a long time ago, the land was gold. The rivers flowed and trees grew to old age. Buffalo roamed and the bobcats hunted. The canopy of oaks could grow unhindered. In earlier times, human civilizations had better appreciation of nature. In Japan, the rise of Shintoism in prehistoric times saw the worshiping of plants and nature. Animals and the earth all had spirits. The word Kodama,



in Japanese, means the spirits that inhabit the trees. People at various times and places have worshipped the trees.



*Original distribution of plains, wood, and Holocene bison.*

Some woody perennial plants, like General Sherman, might be perceived as having old souls. This type of spirituality might resonate more with the concept of living with the wind.

In fact, three million years ago, there used to be sixty million buffalo on the Great Plains. This was a time before the Mississippi River existed. Once, I went on a road trip with a friend to South Dakota. We saw Mount Rushmore, the beautiful Needles Highway, visited the Badlands, the tourist stop called Wall Drug, and the Black Hills. But my favorite place of all those stops was Custer State Park. Driving on the road, at one point a herd of buffalo took over the street. Looks like traffic was slow

that day. Then, it started to rain. Looking over the hills in the skyline, a flash of lighting and a loud clap of thunder struck the earth. In that moment, I felt a sense of timelessness, like the buffalo had always existed there for millions of years, walking in the prairie, chewing grass slower than ever, and it was epic.



*Needles Highway*

What does the General Sherman tree think of the movement to protect the environment? Nothing, trees don't have opinions. But perhaps we can do better to be like trees and grow mentally by having an open mind and

learning more about how to be in tune with the earth. The heart, the brain and the memories of the trees are all in their roots. They breathe through their base. Humans can also work on exercising more, eating healthier, and practicing more love and acceptance. The spirit of the buffalo is in the wind. When loggers cut down a tree, we should be there to plant a thousand seeds.



*A picture of me at Sequoia National Forest.*

Towards the end of his life Malcolm X began believing in a broad coalition for integration. These chapters were removed from his autobiography. While Dr.

King and Malcolm X often had clashing ideals, they both believed in social justice, opposed racism, and worked for a peaceful world. They inspired the characters Charles Xavier and Magneto in the X-Men. Civil disobedience can change oppressive institutions that go against nature. What if halfway through the civil rights movement, Dr. King decided that he was tired of all the hate that he had seen, and he got on a plane and took a vacation? What if Rosa Parks changed her mind about protesting bus segregation and just brought her bicycle? The world needs troublemakers, rebels, and renegades that consciously disagree with the status quo and work to make change. Some of us sleep more soundly at night. Others stay up late, working into the night, bothered by the problems of the world, lighting their candle, and burning the midnight oil. As you read this book, I hope it became clear that the struggles of the past produce a lit flame that burns as bright as ever today.

Once, when I was a law student, I was depressed about social justice activism, and I wrote to a friend about my concerns. This person gave the following advice:

I am sorry that you are struggling to find a path that is authentic to you. It is honorable to spend your life being of service, that is why I chose medicine. If you choose to make this your life's work, you have to accept the frustrations that come with it. It is hard...very hard. Not everyone sees things the way you do and that is not necessarily always a bad thing. And sometimes you will be afraid, angry, tired and uncertain of whether it is at all worth it.

There isn't anyone who chooses a life of service that does not go through this. The drive to continue lies if not in the result, in the absolute belief in the worth of one's efforts and in your field – law in particular, sometimes the results come way after you are dead and buried, your efforts count in the collective process...

## Appendix #1: Owl

### Selma

In the summer of 1964,  
The President said march no more,  
The people marched and the vote was won,  
Singing and chanting we shall overcome,

The President said that 1965,  
Was not the year for voting rights to arrive,  
But Selma marched to that freedom song,  
And those marchers proved Johnson wrong,

By the time that those marches were done,  
Even Mr. Johnson said we shall overcome,  
And when Dr. King saw that speech on TV,  
A tear drop rolled down his cheek,

## Frederick Douglass

He grew up in the worst way,  
Didn't know his birthday,  
Struggle from the first day,  
More than even words say,

He barely knew his own mom,  
One woman so strong,  
Twelve miles she had gone,  
Just to see her little one,

And if she wasn't back in time,  
Her master put her back in line,  
Making sure her son was fine,  
Was this woman's only crime,

He did know his own dad,  
One man so sad,  
Selling people made him glad,  
Even if they called him dad,

## General Sherman

If I were a seed you could bury me,  
Next to the General Sherman tree,  
I'll grow tall and strong and breathe,  
And help restore the canopy,

The buffalo will run free,  
From South Dakota to New York City,  
From Minnesota to northern Florida,  
From the Hudson to the Mississippi,

The mountains, the grass, and the river's spirit,  
Silently waiting, hoping you'll hear it,  
The earthquake tremor, the seismic shift,  
Of countless buffalo running swift,  
Thunder crashes and the heavens part,  
To hear this land's beating heart,



## Ecology Quiz Answers

1. A
2. C
3. B
4. D
5. A
6. D
7. C
8. B
9. C
10. D

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